Young Men In Love

by Michael Arlen

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MICHAEL ARLEN

By MICHAEL ARLEN

Young Men In Love
May Fair
The Green Hat
These Charming People
"Piracy"
The Romantic Lady
The London Venture

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by

Michael Arlen

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YOUNG MEN IN LOVE
— A —
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To MAX

I have searched for a phrase to put beside your name, but I have not found it, maybe there is not that phrase, so let us leave it at—

To MAX

YOUNG MEN IN LOVE

What is Love? I asked a lover—
Liken it, he answered, weeping,
To a flood unchained and sweeping
Over shell-strewn grottoes, over
Beds of roses, lilies, tulips,
O'er all flowers that most enrich the
Garden, in one headlong torrent,
Till they shew a wreck from which the
Eye and mind recoil abhorrent.
Hearts may woo hearts, lips may woo lips,
And gay days be spent in gladness,
Dancing, feasting, lilting, luting,
But the end of all is Sadness,
Desolation, Devastation,
Spoliation and Uprooting!

JAMES CLARENCE MANGAN
(1803-1849)

YOUNG MEN IN LOVE

BOOK ONE

THIS is a very difficult tale to write. All tales are, and that is why the people who sit down to write a novel, saying: "I will write a novel. A man must eat, so why not a novel?" are unreasonable and must not expect too much. To write a novel is a high ambition. To begin with, one must be a magician. And to end with, one must be a magician. It is all a magical business. To write a tale, a man must say to himself: "I am a magician. I will now go and collect into a nosegay the lights and shadows that pave the Thames at night by Westminster Bridge." Naturally, that is not easy. The main difficulty lies, of course, in the fact that lights and shadows do not stay in the same place. A ripple, a breeze, a blink, and the pattern is smudged, the tracery awry, our philosophy a farce, our magic a muddle. Stand a foot this way or that way, and what was a light is a deep shadow, what was a shadow is a dancing light. What can we do, how can we see straight? Life meanders on, changeless and ever changing. Nothing is exactly how we see it. Nothing, alas, remains exactly where we last saw it. Alas! And that is why it is so difficult to write a thoughtful book.

Now we have passed through almost a decade of "disenchantment," which is the fashionable word for the dread disease that afflicts hope. It is no use trying to call it "disappointment," for there is a fashion in

words of suffering. Of course, "discouragement" is the right word, but let us get on with the story.

It may be that people of thirty or so have suffered the most from this recent plague of disenchantment. That is natural, for youth is proud and needs chastisement. Apart from that, however, modern young men are too easily deluded. They ask for trouble. They are so sceptical, they believe nothing that they are told. They are so credulous, they believe everything that they tell themselves.

It is all ancient history. In the autumn of the year 1918, for instance, they thought that the war was over. They thought that a modern war could be "over." They also thought that the Allies had won the war. They did not know that it is impossible for even angels to "win" a modern war. Thus were they plunged in error, to awake to disenchantment.

These young men had come home from the war convinced that the world of their fathers was not good enough for them. They were bored to death with the world of their fathers. They were bored to death with the lies that their fathers and grandfathers had established as "common-sense." They were bored with their fathers. It is said: "Charity begins at home." It should be added: "Tolerance looks out of the windows." Therefore these young men were not at all swayed by the wisdom of that gentle sage who has said: "Let us excuse our fathers' faults; they are younger than ourselves."

Perhaps it was the same sage who said that youth is religious, but knows not what to worship. But these war-burnt youths saw clearly enough what to worship. They worshipped peace. They did not know that peace is a fatal dream. They worshipped tolerance, and tolerance is a malady. For Our Saviour said: "I come bearing a sword." And He left it behind Him.

This presumptuous worship of peace lured men to strange and unseemly visions. They saw a world

founded on principles of pity and justice, governed by intelligent patriots, encompassed by charity and light. At first, statesmen encouraged these visions. Statesmen beamed with Hope. As for the churches, there had been no Church to speak of in England for some time. But there will always be plenty of Churchmen in countries without birth-control. And Churchmen, being great beamers, made the best of a bad job and also beamed with Hope, with only a few reservations, born of the Anglican clergy's unquenchable desire to please, of the "Lest We Forget" and "Hang the Kaiser" variety. Thus exhorted, the Lord of Hosts aroused himself and gave England the Coalition Government, whereby the dove of peace settled beautifully on the white locks of Mr. Lloyd George. There was rejoicing. The papers of that time are full of photographs of Mr. Lloyd George beaming with Hope at railway stations. There appeared to be something about the railway stations of Great Britain and France that affected most statesmen with an almost intolerable burden of Hope.

The defeat of Woodrow Wilson was for the time being the defeat of all dreamers. People stopped beaming with Hope. Statesmen hurried through railway stations. We must not, of course, attach too much importance to Woodrow Wilson. He was a very vain and, in many ways, a very silly man, even for a statesman. But he was charged with a fine idea. Woodrow Wilson was a sort of filleted Cecil Rhodes; with vanity for vainglory, the vice of solitude for the vice of schoolboyishness, and an Empire of dreams for a dream of Empire. When Wilson fell, men awoke with a start to find intact the terrible inheritance of their fathers, the world we live in, the world of "common-sense" that says "War is inevitable" because in the dawn of history one muddle-headed ass gave another muddle-headed ass a crack on the head with a stone club.

Such a world was made to the hands of Serle, the

politician, Townleigh, the newspaper-magnate, Vardon, the financier. They could "deal with it." Let us call them, merely to be dramatic and to please the public, the three horsemen of the Apocalypse; Politics, the Press, and Finance.

In the eyes of many of their contemporaries these three men were full of sin, but their one unpardonable sin was this: they were successful, and they made success beastly.

But no man born of woman can be described in terms of sin alone. To do so is an offence against good sense, and it is also in the worst of taste. "For the man who realises only the evil that is in the human race there awaits the nail on the back of his door; he may, if he cares, shut the door and hang himself on the nail." But let him not judge his fellow-men, for he knows nothing, he is nothing, and even his death will have no meaning.

These three men must be explained somehow. They must at least be definitely indicated. They are the background of the story of Savile, Venetia, Raphael, and the others. They are the riders in the darkness around the mountain that some young people tried passionately to climb. For this is a love-story.

THE first quarter of the twentieth century has been remarkable for the defiant onrush through the strata of society of such men as Serle, Lord Townleigh, and Jasper Vardon. They must not by any means be confused with the horde of *nouveaux riches* and profiteers who arose on the ruins of war. They were of an older sort, of an older venturesomeness. They were not fat-minded men. Their aspirations were not polite. The profound silliness with which wealth afflicts so many worthy men was not their silliness. *Ton* bored them. They accepted the company of princes with the resignation of philosophers and the

irony of pirates. They considered that the conduct of their lives in private was emphatically their own business. In the view of a great many people these three men were a grave detriment to the social order, to the political life of the country, and to the prestige of the Empire at large. Intellectual men considered them to be vulgar adventurers; not, in the grand manner, "adventurers in devotion to an impulse," but in bondage to a low desire for power.

Very human, though, that "low desire for power." All men of imagination have it, in one form or another. And these three were men of imagination. Not the pale sort . . . but men. Guts. Realists. Inheritors of the earth. The big stuff. Pomeranian grenadiers of the mind. Men! And of course, like all men of imagination, they suffered. But the world suffered with them.

Mr. Havelock Ellis tells us that the philosopher Hans Vaihinger has defined man as "a species of ape afflicted by megalomania."

Now of these three gentlemen, the Right Honourable Peter Antony Serle, P.C., M.P., is perhaps the most interesting. Serle's political good fortune has been of the stuff that a politician's dreams are made on. He has survived the fury of opponents, the venom of rumour, the indignation of the people, the treacheries of his friends, his own treacheries, the displeasure of his King and the awful boredom of the fates. He has changed from Liberal to Conservative, from Coalition to Die-hard. When he threw Carson over in June, 1914, on the Irish question and crossed back to the Liberal benches, it was said that Serle was "finished." It was said that no Party would ever trust him again. When, eight years later, he turned his back on Mr. Lloyd George and just survived the rout of the Coalition, it was said that Serle was "finished." It was said that no Party would ever trust him again. It is a sad fact, however, that trustworthy men are seldom

those who are called to eminence. Good servants are trustworthy, and it is doubtful whether there is a great man in history who would not, as a valet, have pilfered from his master. Serle has held every post in the Cabinet but that of Prime Minister. The *Morning Post* has openly doubted whether Mr. Serle's rumoured ambition to be Prime Minister of England will ever be fulfilled while a gentleman is King of England. The doubts of that excellent newspaper cannot, unfortunately, awake and deafen the public consciousness with that startling roar that daily issues from the organs of the Consolidated Press, that amalgamation of newspapers of which the chief proprietor, chief director, chief editorial-staff, and chief financial-adviser is one Gabriel Sass, 1st Baron Sass, 1st Viscount Archery, and 1st Earl of Townleigh.

The great newspaper-magnates are among the phenomena of our time. They are mighty, they are mysterious. Theirs the power, and who wishes may claim the glory. The great captains of the past would have done well to have exercised even a little of such admirable restraint. Nevertheless, many unkind things are said about newspaper-magnates. People murmur against them, saying: "Behold, they are sinners, and they seek to govern our opinions, our very destinies! Shame on them, for they are not children of light!" On the contrary, let us praise them. In their private lives they have without exception been known to be good sons and upright men. Moreover, it has been observed that the esteem in which they are held increases with their years. Lord Townleigh, however, challenges immortality not only as a newspaper-magnate. His great name is associated with those of the immortal winners of the Derby, the St. Leger and the Grand National.

The curious will first meet with the name of Gabriel Sass in connection with the early fortunes in South Africa of Barnato and the Joels. The legends that tell

of those great days are somewhat confusing. That is not surprising, when we come to think of the confusion attendant on all great beginnings. One point, however, is quite clear, that Jerry Sass was generally where the diamonds were. Another point is almost as clear, that Jerry Sass was not born to live by diamonds alone. Ambition called him. Dreams of power were sweet to him. And what power was there to be gotten in South Africa, but the power to leave it! Diamonds were but the servants of a dominating mind. The Romance of Jerry Sass appealed to the imagination of Jerry Sass with intolerable persistence.

Nevertheless, he took precautions. Before coming to London, he grew a beard. It was a fine black beard, and amply concealed a receding chin. His nose rose above it like a menace, proudly, magnificently, unquenchably Jewish. Jerry Sass was proud of being a Jew. He was one of those masterful Jews who are peculiar to England: that is to say, when they have arrived in England. There appear to be very few such in, for instance, America. America has the Jews it deserves, England those it serves.

Jerry Sass was next heard of in 1904 as the proprietor of an extraordinarily inquisitive daily paper. Not long after, the anonymously-published political information of the *National* became so accurate as to be startling to the Government of the day, and so picturesque as to be the despair of the rival Harmsworth Press. It was supplied by Serle, then an obscure Member of Parliament.

Sass was an inspired newspaper-man. That is to say, his newspapers had orders to attack the restrictions of law and the limitations of order at every opportunity. But when the good of the people was at stake, when the health of humanity was menaced, Jerry Sass was the first policeman. This was made quite clear in 1908 when a gentleman of Russian extraction, Stravolgin, was haled before the courts by Sass and sentenced to

a long term of penal servitude for blackmail with threats of violence.

From the day of the foundation of the *National* Sass has never, as the saying is, looked back. Behind him lay diamonds—and desperadoes like Pyotr Stravolgin. Before him, the Romance of Power. He wrote a book about that, to the end that young men should not lack example and encouragement. But young men lacked that unquenchable nose, that mighty beard, those diamonds.

His faithful wife Rebecca did not live to see her husband take his proper place among the illustrious men of England. But her death was strangely prophetic of his destiny as a great Englishman. She died of ambition, having gone to a Charity Ball dressed as Britannia and caught cold.

She had borne her lord three children, Esther, Michael, and Raphael. Michael was a good boy. Raphael was a comedian—on Russian lines. Esther, the eldest, was the artistic one. They grew up strong and sound of limb, and their father loved them with a jealous love. But it was written that all should not go well with these children in the end.

It is by his beard that my Lord Townleigh shall be remembered by our children. Even before the war, it had assumed the grandeur of an institution. With the war, it became a menace—to Germany, to pacificists, to poor Mr. Asquith. He had his private troubles. But among the people he never failed to bear himself but with a proud and boisterous eye. After the war, Lord Townleigh enjoyed a second blooming. His beard remained black and could assume a remarkable gloss. At night, in charming surroundings, it did assume a remarkable gloss, and was verily as the leaves of a great tree that o'erspread the honours of Lord Townleigh: his millions, his newspapers, his titles, his collection of diamonds, his racehorses, his yachts, his children, his estates. During his second blooming,

moreover, the Romance of Power in some measure gave way before romance of a less aggressive if not a less public sort. That was not unnatural; in his youth Jerry Sass had dug for diamonds; in his old age Lord Townleigh had time to learn dancing. Nevertheless, he continued to love his child with a jealous love. For two had died by the way.

It was of financiers of the order of Jasper Vardon that a well-known after-dinner speaker recently said: "A man is known by the companies he promotes." Nevertheless, of our three adventurers Vardon was perhaps the least disliked by people of gentle breeding. That may be due to the fact, which foreigners find most peculiar, that a millionaire who speaks English with the pronounced dialect of a northern county is apt to be more likable to gentlefolk than one who merely speaks English. People frequently tell stories in Vardon's manner, and there is laughter. They imitate the way he says: "I agree." It is also interesting to note that, from the time of Henry VIII. to this of Jasper Vardon, no one has more readily commanded the sympathies of a majority of Englishmen than one who by every word and action of his life has let it be clearly understood that he does not aspire to a better one. That may also account for the sympathetic view most Englishmen have always taken of the Turks.

Nothing was more remarkable in these three men than their energy. Their energy was paramount. It was a fire ceaselessly fed by their nerves and their capacity for tasting life. For that is what they had to a superlative degree, a capacity for *tasting* life. There was something astonishingly idiotic about their energy. It was as though these three men were riding headlong on sweating horses. On and on they rode, forever, down and up and on along the twisting, noisy labyrinths of their lives, across the landscape of the world of strife. You could not tell the why nor the whither of that furious race. They did not know themselves.

They were the "lords and owners of their faces"; that was all they knew. They rode on, the air about them ceaselessly filled with the discord of their careers. Before eternity took them unawares, they would taste the world.

They loved to ride dangerously—when it was safe. Yet their vanity urged them to look as though they were always riding dangerously. Now and then they fouled each other. But they had comfort of each other's understanding. They could ignore criticism, condemnation, contempt, so only they could be sure that they were men of destiny. But they could never be sure. That is the tragedy of men of destiny, they can never be quite sure that they are not men of straw.

Venetia rode with these men.

TO Jasper Vardon and his wife Matilda was born in the seaside town of Southport in Lancashire, in the year 1899, a daughter whom they named Venetia. The name Venetia was young Vardon's formal expression of opinion as to the destinies of the house of Vardon. These destinies the young Lancashire financier was already shaping at the Exchanges of Liverpool and Manchester, to one or other of which he would take an early morning train from Southport. Sometimes he would not return for weeks at a time. He was understood to be speculating in cotton, a venturesome business calling for a degree of application that leaves a man but little time to soothe away domestic contacts of a jealous nature. Domestic contacts were not, however, to distract Jasper Vardon from the real business of life for long. He was one of those men to whom marriage comes but once in a lifetime; to depart leaving no trace, nor any mark of its passage, except such as can be found in the vulgar logic of grim witticisms like: "Any man who marries a second time does not deserve to have lost his first wife."

It was during one of his absences that Mrs. Vardon passed quietly away of a weak chest and a sense of injustice. Venetia was then two years old, and on such excellent terms with her nurse that the passing of Mrs. Vardon seemed to her the unimportant event in her life that it actually was. Presently the Vardon household was moved to London, where Jasper Vardon had established important financial connections; with, in particular, the private banking-house of Sass & Fairchild.

At about the same time, and at Vardon's instigation, and expense, a slender young man with a sharp, lean face, dark offensive eyes, and a dictatorial voice, also left Lancashire for London. Vardon had met this young man at Owen's College, Manchester, where the latter had taken his degree with notable honours. By coming to London he was understood to have sacrificed a position of increasing importance as a student of politics and a light of Liberalism on the staff of the *Manchester Guardian.* His name was Peter Serle. The history of Liberalism is the history of insolent personalities governed by an aggressive and frequently ill-timed benevolence. The young Serle was Liberalism incarnate. It naturally followed that Liberalism could not hold him long. Had he had more respect for gentlemen, he would have become a Socialist. So in due course he turned Conservative.

Venetia's life may be divided into four parts. It will not be an exact division, nor will it be an entirely true one, but it must do for the time being. For her first five years Venetia fell through life. For her next five years she ran, skipped, and fell through life. For her next five years she played, wondered, screamed, giggled, and fell through life. For her next five years she did what she ought not to have done. Then, she had time to sit and wonder.

The observant reader will notice that the above paragraph, which is written throughout in the simplest

possible language, quickly becomes wearisome. That is due to the repetition of the word "fell." And that, in its turn, is due to the fact that we are speaking of Venetia, who could not walk. Her feet were very small. Her feet were too small. Unable to keep up with Venetia's growth, they turned against her. Like Mexico, they were a disorder unto themselves. Her legs were lovely things, and like all lovely things they were hopeless before the authority of petty masters. To watch Venetia walking was an alarming spectacle. Would she fall or would she not fall? And if she fell, could she ever rise again? Were you fond of Venetia, you could scarcely bear to see her walking. Anything, you felt, might happen to the girl even as she walked across a room. She might break.

Venetia, but for her shadowy legs, was a plump child. A fashionable mother would have despaired of her figure. Marjorie Serle, whose favourite reading at the age of ten was the *Tatler,* did not consider Venetia a possible rival as a *débutante.* Maybe that was why Marjorie was so annoyed with Venetia later on. For those legs, which were lovely things, governed Venetia's growth. She became a slender girl. She became one of a vast generation of long-limbed slender girls in countries with falling birth rates.

Venetia's childhood is not interesting. She was of a philosophic turn. She gave no trouble and she took no trouble. She took herself as she found herself, and others as they found her. She was devoid of self-pity. She appeared to have no idea of her situation, which was forlorn and pathetic. She did not dramatise herself. Ordinary people don't until the age of about seventeen. Had she been able to take herself or her boredoms with any seriousness, she would have realised that her childhood was lonely, unhappy and neglected; that she was, in short, the poor little rich girl of the story-books. But Venetia was born without the superstition of happiness. The superstition of happiness

has been expressed once and for all in the song "I Want to be Happy." But Venetia expected nothing. She was wise with puppy wisdom. She was a hedonist, but she was intelligent enough to be sceptical of pleasure. Moreover, she entertained grave doubts as to the value of mankind in general, and the importance of some men in particular. She grew up to divide men into two classes; the men who thought themselves more important than they were, and the men who thought they were not important enough; and there was good in both.

Venetia was beautiful. She became beautiful suddenly, at the age of thirteen. She became beautiful because some one told her that she was beautiful. For it is true that the works of God do not enter into their full estate until they have been given the approbation of mankind.

Aunt Alice was the cause of this improvement. One day Venetia had just come home from her school in Green Street with Marjorie Serle in Marjorie's father's motor-car. Marjorie never came in but always left Venetia at her door, because it appeared that Mrs. Serle did not like Aunt Alice, who lived with the Vardons. That seemed odd to Venetia, as Black Petah was always in the house and seemed to like Aunt Alice very much indeed, and Black Petah was supposed to be Marjorie's father and Mrs. Serle's husband, and therefore—oh well, grown-ups!

Venetia let herself in very quietly that afternoon. Then she heard the voices of Aunt Alice and Daddy in the little sitting-room by the hall. It was unbelievably difficult not to hear what they were saying, as the door was ajar. Aunt Alice was saying with a funny catch in her voice:

"I've thought it all over very carefully, Jasper. My position's ever so clear. And, dear, you know that as well as I do. I am doing the child a great wrong by staying."

Daddy's voice said sulkily:

"I'm damned if I know what has come over you suddenly, Alice. You've been here four years—and how's anything different now?"

Venetia absolutely agreed with Daddy, whom she had not hitherto credited with so much sense. Dear Daddy!

"Oh, why won't you understand!" Aunt Alice cried. Venetia was astounded and hurt. There were tears in Aunt Alice's voice! "Of course everything's different, Jasper. She's growing up—here, in this house—in this atmosphere!"

"Look here, Alice," Daddy began. Daddy was getting angry. Venetia held her breath. Daddy had a cold, thin-lipped temper.

But Aunt Alice went on queerly: "In this house of men and of women made only for men!"

"The cook will be flattered!" Daddy laughed, but Aunt Alice cried out sadly:

"And she's so beautiful, Jasper! Oh, it makes me so sad! Is life so easy for beautiful people that we should go out of our way to make it difficult for Venetia? She will have no chance in what is called the world because of the way you have brought her up. What will happen to the darling? Before you know where you are she will be a raving beauty—and then, Jasper? How will you take care of her? Who will take care of her?"

"There's you, Alice!" Daddy said.

It was at that moment that the work of God in the hall trembled and was beautiful. But she cared nothing for such vanities then. She cared only for Aunt Alice's dear broken voice.

Daddy was saying solemnly:

"Look here, Alice, I want to tell you something. I would rather have my child cared for by you than by the whole damned respectable world put together."

"Oh, dear God, *me*!" cried Aunt Alice, and Venetia

fled. For nights and nights that "Me!" was to ring in Venetia's heart like a pitiful little bell calling her to listen to fears she could not understand.

However, everything passes. Aunt Alice did not go away that time.

Of course, Venetia had always known that Aunt Alice was not really her Aunt Alice. She had vaguely understood that Aunt Alice's name was Mrs. Craven, which meant nothing to Venetia, and that she had come to live in the same house with them, which meant everything to Venetia, because she was Daddy's great friend. Aunt Alice had tortoiseshell hair and a laughing face and soft, soft hands. She had a beautiful little straight nose, an ivory complexion, and great brown eyes that looked sad when they were not smiling. She was stately. She dressed beautifully in dark colours, but they looked gay on her, and she sang to herself as she walked about the house, as though the house were a garden.

Venetia gathered, from little bits she overheard, that the servants disapproved of Aunt Alice on the ground that she was out of place in a "Christian house." But Venetia never attached any importance to other people's criticisms of her friends. However, she was a seeker after knowledge. One day she asked Black Petah what a "Christian house" was, and he said it was a house with glass walls so that passers-by could see what a lot of Bibles there were in it.

One thing Venetia could never understand about Aunt Alice was why she appeared to have no friends of her own, for no one ever came to see her in the afternoons, and only father's friends in the evenings, like old Townleigh and dear Black Petah.

The conversation of Black Petah and Venetia was agreeable to them because it was natural, incredible, and voluntary. They did not kill conversation by expecting the truth from each other; nor did they kill the truth by expecting conversation from each other.

It was Black Petah who brought her the book telling of the quest of the Holy Grail, and he brought her many other books, saying: "Venetia, never believe in any superstition, never believe in any cruel punishment that will happen to you if you do wrong—and that's why it is only fair to do right—never believe in dull or dreadful things, no matter how true they may be, but believe in these beautiful legends just because they are beautiful." When Black Petah spoke to her he always spoke in a gentle voice, but sometimes when Venetia was upstairs and Daddy had friends to dinner, she could hear Black Petah's voice in the distance, sharp and commanding, like a king's. And she loved him more than she loved Daddy, because he did not smell so strong. Uncle Jerry had a smell too.

It should be explained that through a great part of her childhood Venetia had regarded Daddy as a smell behind a tickle. At an early age, however, Venetia had acquired resignation, which is a virtue, and therefore admirable. But even a virtue can be carried too far. Drake, for instance, carried patriotism so far as to be indistinguishable from piracy. Venetia carried resignation, which is conscious of grave faults in mankind, so far as to be indistinguishable from absent-mindedness, which is conscious of nothing and is understood to add to the charm of elderly statesmen. She grew to find the smell not too disagreeable. She even grew to associate it with manliness. Without the smell, a man could scarcely be a man. Of course, Petah hadn't got it, but then he was a prince among men. Daddy told her laughingly one day that the smell came out of a bottle. But Venetia could divide it into three separate and distinct compartments. For one thing, Daddy always smelt of soap. Then, there were cigars. And lastly, the bottle. Venetia came to think of them as Daddy's three invisible companions. She called them Pip, Squeak, and Wilfred. Of course, Wilfred was much the strongest.

Sometimes when Aunt Alice came to kiss her good-night Venetia thought she sniffed a bit of Wilfred. But he was so tame after the way he would romp around Daddy or Black Petah that Venetia didn't deign to notice him.

TOWARDS the end of her seventeenth year things began to happen to Venetia. They happened in a furtive yet insistent and uncomfortable way, as though intent to undermine the philosophy of one who gave no trouble and took no trouble. Until then, Venetia had not realised her thoughts; nor even that she was thinking at all about anything. Suddenly she discovered that she had been thinking a great deal about everything.

This discovery was attended with distressing results for her. Nevertheless, since Venetia was not timid within the four walls of her soul, she persisted. To begin with, however, she hid her astonishment at the discovery that she had a mind that could actually think, and appeared self-possessed. But it was at that time that her eyes began to wear that helpless look which they were never afterwards to lose.

Venetia felt helpless, lost. Her assurance flew from her like a startled bird. Perplexity entered her soul, married her innocence, and multiplied exceedingly. Things that had hitherto been quite clear and self-evident were now confused, inexplicable, and vaguely horrible. Things that had hitherto appeared quite natural now appeared incredible, for they were explained. O Knowledge, with what travail do you come to birth, with what bitter poison you instil your darts! It was well said by the ancients: "Ignorance is a virtue."

Venetia felt the world stirring beneath her feet, in her heart, in her breast, in her head, stirring like a sleepy beast, stirring, stirring. The many books that

she had read, books above her years, began to stalk her memory with new and cruel meanings. She knew fear. Vaguely but insistently she felt the cruelty that lurked behind many things, the stealthy cruelty that crept on and on down the dark corridor of the ages. Her eyes were opened to Nature, savage, remorseless, blind. She had not read Anatole France, who wrote: "We simply have to pardon Nature." But it is true that M. France was an old man when he wrote that.

She cried out bitterly against the darkening colour of her mind, against the necessity of having a mind at all. She could not know that her youth rose paramount even as she cried to herself that her youth had been betrayed. She could not know that it was a child who lay awake at night and felt cheated of the joy of childish dreams. She could not know that it is only on child-like minds that knowledge descends, for what is it that comes to the sophisticated but vanity and issues thence but wind?

How often she longed during term-time at school on the Berkshire Downs to have a talk with Black Petah! Michael wouldn't do, he was so good and beautiful, but he wouldn't do, he was too young, whereas sharp and clear was the reasoning of Black Petah, and his words had the impalpable and august odour of immemorial stones.

Venetia was happy at school, happy in her prowess at games, happy in the health and strength and slenderness of her long limbs, happy in the love of her companions, in enjoying what they enjoyed and in accepting what they thought; until she felt stirring within her the birth of a knowledge that she mistrusted yet wooed, a knowledge that could not be expressed in speech, that would not even take tangible shape as thoughts that she could develop into sense or dismiss as nonsense.

Venetia hid all this beneath an air of calm that was so spurious that she was ashamed before her friends.

She came to reflect, however, that each one of her companions was proudly hiding similar perplexities beneath the outward show. But often she condemned herself bitterly for what, with the uncompromising severity of a prefect and head of games, she termed her "beastly superiority."

Venetia was humble. Humility was to be the captain of Venetia's destiny, and she should therefore have found grace. Yet was she lost to grace, for she was treading that devious path which is skirted by trees that are trying to explain why their leaves fall and by flowers that are trying to whisper why they die; she was trying to reason about things that are unreasonable.

VENETIA arrived home for the Easter holidays late one afternoon. It was a grey day, raining pettishly. It was to be the loneliest day of her life.

London looked sulky and tired. The streets from Paddington to Brook Street were dirty. There was a helpless look of dirt about everything. The stretch of Lancaster Gate wore a woebegone, blowsy air, like a passage in a lodging-house. Walking aimlessly about were soldiers in groups of three or four, small, unkempt, absurdly unwarlike. In all London, it seemed to Venetia, there was not a proud eye, not an arrogant walk, not a straight line. London had lost its pride. Stripped for war, London looked like a slatternly charwoman. As her taxi slithered around the Marble Arch, Venetia's eye caught the placard of an evening paper. On the white surface were two short words, black and menacing. They were in a foreign language, she could not understand them. The words were SINN FEIN. That was the unhappy Easter of 1916.

Daddy himself opened the door before Venetia had time to ring the bell. Daddy was like that, he would

have fits of prowling about the house, looking out of unexpected windows with a half-empty, smelly tumbler in his hand.

Venetia said:

"Daddy, *beastly* day!"

Vardon walked across the pavement to pay the taxi. Then he turned his face up to the rain for a moment. Venetia watched him from the open doorway. Trellis, murmuring a greeting, came out of the house to deal with the luggage. Daddy looked thoughtful. As they went into the house Venetia asked the question that had been on her mind since she alighted at Paddington.

"Why didn't Aunt Alice meet me at the station?"

Daddy vaguely said: "What?"

He looked thoughtful.

He said: "Damn it, I'm expecting a message from those blockheads at the Foreign Office, and if it doesn't come in time I won't get that boat. I may have to go to Spain to-night. Sorry to leave you alone, Venetia. Blame the war."

Venetia said: "Alone, Daddy? Alone?"

They were in the hall. There was a narrow hall leading into a large hall where there were deep chairs and lounges and all the papers, magazines and weeklies, and, above the fireplace, a large portrait of Jasper Vardon by Orpen. You could see that Orpen had privately labelled his portrait: "Portrait of a Financier, blast him!"

On the oak-chest in the narrow hall were men's hats and sticks thrown anyhow. There was an air of unrest about the house. "Blame the war." Daddy looked thinner and redder. Vardon's eyes looked as though they would have been quite colourless if some one, as an afterthought, had not dropped a touch of blue into them. He was quite bald, but handsome in a bleak, red way. Very red he was. He smiled at Venetia as though he was very pleased indeed to see her but too busy to say so. He vaguely patted her shoulder.

"You've grown a lot, Venetia. You'll soon be too tall for me to dance with."

"But, Daddy, Aunt Alice?"

"There's no Aunt Alice," said Vardon, as though it was of no importance.

Venetia suddenly heard Black Petah's voice raised in argument from the library at the far end of the lounge.

She whispered: "Daddy!"

"Get on, get on!" said Vardon brusquely, indicating the stairway. "Get yourself clean for dinner; no time to dress this evening, we're all too busy." He suddenly whipped a cigar from his pocket and stuck it into his mouth. Then Venetia knew he was nervous.

He said:

"Aunt Alice went about a week ago. Left you her love. That's all I know."

Then Venetia said to Jasper Vardon:

"Why didn't you ask her to marry you?"

Her father's intelligence, for the first and last time in her life, disappointed her.

He said:

"Hel*lo*, baby! Do they teach you to ask such questions at school?"

Venetia said: "I'm not going back to school."

Vardon shrugged his shoulders. "You'll be bored," he said. "But please yourself."

Her future yawned at Venetia's feet like a black pit. She was to please herself. . . .

In her father, Nature stared her in the face. It wanted a Joan of Arc, pure and fearless, to deal with such a man as Jasper Vardon. Venetia stared at him, scornfully, helplessly. Aunt Alice had given, and was gone. Years before, Venetia had watched a lady tennis-champion playing in a tournament and had been astounded into a giggle at the number of petticoats that the good lady was wearing. Since then she had sometimes felt almost naked while playing tennis.

Now, it was as though she had been playing at life in petticoats, and suddenly they had tumbled in a heap, and she felt naked and cold. She repeated scornfully:

"Why didn't you ask her to marry you?"

Vardon lit his cigar. In the flare of the match she thought that he was smiling queerly. She had a definite feeling that he was proud of her for asking a beastly question. She could hear him thinking: "The girl's got guts!"

And she hadn't. "No guts," she thought helplessly. She knew herself. Knowing herself was Venetia's vice.

He answered her as though he recognised that she was grown up. He said:

"I did. She wouldn't. I'm no sort of a rival for an angel of the Lord."

Venetia saw and heard Aunt Alice. Her eyes suddenly clouded over, and she began trembling.

"Oh dear!" she said. "Oh dear!"

"I agree," said Vardon.

"You beast!" sobbed Venetia uncontrollably. "You didn't ask her until it was too late—you didn't ask her until you were afraid she was actually going! You beast!"

"If you like," said Vardon coldly. "You've been reading too many books."

And he turned on his heel and strode across the wide hall into the library.

As the door of the library closed on her father, Venetia became an orphan. Jasper Vardon could brook no criticism from any woman. He instantly closed his heart against any woman who criticised him. That was his character, unalterable, Oriental. But Vardon's cruelty was not aggressive. Curiously enough, it was the least vulgar thing about him. It was like a stone, inactive, hard, immovable. He was at your service, genial, amiable, but supremely indifferent. He could yield no rights over himself to

any woman who did not take him in every detail as she found him. Gradually Venetia was to understand that she and her father were to be just friends, sympathetic but never intimate. They were to amuse each other when they met. There was no necessity for one to worry the other with any intimacies.

IT was past seven o'clock when Venetia finally entered the library. Her entrance excited no interest. She was grateful for the pall of words in which she was instantly clothed. She gathered for the first time that there had been a rebellion in Ireland. The air in the library was thick with smoke. A box of Gold Flake looked as though it was painted on the shiny face of the table. Black Petah always smoked Gold Flake. They stained his lean grasping fingers, and were offensive to the nostrils of high-born ladies. He was such a baby, maybe that was why he smoked them.

Serle appeared to be furious about Ireland and England and everybody. He threw words at Townleigh and Vardon like an angry boy throwing pebbles. He shouted, as though they were deaf. Those were the terrible days of the war when men exercised a supreme effort of will to close their minds against despair. They shouted despair away from them. They yelled at each other to take heart. How they yelled!

It was as though the trouble in Ireland had come as something of a relief to Serle: the worst had at last happened, England must henceforward turn the corner. He said angrily: "My God, nationality has got on my nerves!"

Vardon said: "What's more important still, it's got on the world's nerves."

Venetia was mildly surprised to see Marjorie Serle curled in a corner of the sofa. They had not met for ages, as they went to different schools. Marjorie's dark, discontented eyes flew from one to other of the

three men as though she was following everything they said. Marjorie was a lady. She spent her life in pretending to feel things she did not feel and not to feel things she did feel. She returned Venetia's kiss absently. That was a pretence too, as she was very aware of Venetia. Venetia had an odd thought, but it was clear and decisive. "This is the last time," she thought, "that Marjorie will ever pretend to like me." There was no particular reason for that prophecy, but Venetia knew that it was a true one. Everything seemed to be dropping away from her this evening, dropping away, abruptly vanishing.

Then Venetia realised with a shock why she had noticed something peculiar about Black Petah. He was in khaki! Captain Serle! Oh dear, and why? The uniform sat on his slim restless figure just anyhow. He didn't look in the least like an officer and a gentleman. He looked Grammar School. Was he going to fight the Irish? No one could fight the Germans in *that* uniform. There were deep lines about his eyes. Venetia had never seen him so haggard. Pitiful, that's how he looked. The war, the war. Captain Serle indeed! Like the brothers of some girls at school, whereas Peter must be forty-five at least, about Daddy's age. And wasn't he a Cabinet Minister too, one of the Men Who Are Winning The War? So maybe it was only a courtesy uniform, like the ones the Prince of Wales would sometimes wear, popping up one day in the *Daily Mirror* as a nice-looking Colonel and the next day in the *Daily Sketch* as a nice-looking Admiral, and no harm done to anybody.

Venetia decided to say nothing about this khaki phase of Peter's, to adopt a superior attitude about it. All he said was: "Well, Venetia, back just in time!" He smiled into her thoughtful face, and his dark contemptuous eyes were beautiful when he smiled. That was the funny part of Black Petah—he didn't, when one knew him, seem even remotely defiant and arro-

gant, but pitiable, as though he *needed* one. How impossible it was, when one knew somebody well, even to understand the queer judgments made on that person by other people. It was as though they were talking of somebody quite different.

Venetia uncomfortably thought: "No good can come from that 'back just in time'!" However, he did not give her a chance to say anything but went on haranguing old Townleigh. Old Townleigh looked back at him like an unhappy basilisk, like a basilisk at a unicorn. Serle said: "The 'loyalty' of Ulster be damned! It's an insult to our intelligence. For pity's sake, let's talk sense! It's the infernal women. . . ."

Daddy, listening, held an enormous tumbler judicially in one hand. Venetia had private information to the effect that that tumbler held exactly one pint of champagne at a go.

Old Townleigh looked ill and harassed, and more Jewish than Moses. Venetia had a fancy that Black Petah had found old Townleigh wandering about the streets and had brought him into the house and had poured him into the first arm-chair, all but his enormous nose and beard; and even they looked limp after their struggle to retain even the shadow of past dominations. Nevertheless, his spirit was unquenchable.

He said:

"I am an optimist. A newspaper-man who is not an optimist is a newspaper-man who is a failure. Optimism is the only possible policy for a great newspaper."

Vardon said deliberately: "I agree."

Serle always spoke rapidly, as though he despised words. He had no hm's and ah's and eh's. His manner was without the charm of hesitation. He just lashed out, and people had to listen, but what enemies he made of his listeners! And he didn't intend to make enemies of them—although, of course, he said he did—it was just his arrogant manner. People are apt to be

against a man who speaks without intruding his teeth, hand, saliva, phlegm, into his conversation. It looks indecently self-confident to use words as an ignorant savage would think they were originally intended to be used, one immediately after another.

Serle said:

"Optimism! Good Lord, we're fairly intelligent people—let's talk sense. Optimism! I've read that in the old days when the gods wanted to make a man mad they invariably began by first making him an optimist."

Old Townleigh said:

"I tell you, man, that I am an optimist! And the attitude of my newspapers to this Sinn Fein menace will be——"

Serle laughed sharply.

"Will be," he said, "just about as helpful as the attitude of your papers to the single command. Blast your papers, Jerry! And you're ruling the roost too, by Jove, you and Northcliffe. Some one will have to sit on you or we may be done. . . ."

Vardon said:

"Burke warned us against Jerry a hundred and forty years ago. It went something like—'Beware of the men who tell you stories every morning and every evening. They will be your masters.' If that doesn't apply to an owner of morning and evening papers, what does?"

Townleigh stroked the cigar-ashes out of his beard on to his black clothes. Tragedy sat in his usually proud and boisterous eyes. Nevertheless, he was unquenchable.

He said:

"You don't understand the Irish, Serle, because you are English. But I understand the Irish very well. I am a modern Jew, and——"

"I know what a Jew is," snapped the falcon to the owl, "but what the devil is a 'modern' Jew?"

Vardon had had financial dealings with Jews, Christians, and politicians. He did not take Jews, Christians, and politicians seriously. He said: "The prophets have warned us against the modern Jew, saying: 'Woe unto him, for he shall cut off his nose to spite his race.'"

Old Townleigh was so distraught he picked his nose and reverted to the language of his fathers. Nevertheless, he was unquenchable. He said: "Chasper, you are choking. This is not a choking matter. . . ."

Serle said: "Damn those Irish! They make the noisiest corpses in history. A couple of dead Irishmen make more hullabaloo than a battery of English guns or an Armenian massacre. A country of madmen. One half as proud of Jesus as though they had invented Him, and the other half as proud of themselves as though they had crucified Him. . . ."

Venetia never listened, but put on a listening face and wondered. She wondered enormously. She tried not to listen, because it was a little frightening, the way they said things. They talked so intimately about large things, countries, people. They sort of called vast countries by their Christian names, and bandied them about. "What are we going to do about Poland afterwards?" "Turkey has *got* to get out of Europe, that's clear." Why was it clear? "Lloyd George would like to see every British soldier out of France and in the East." He would, would he! It was all so unreal, unconvincing, and yet frightening, the intimate way they talked of armies and countries, millions of men, decided their destinies, split them up, sent them here and there.

Serle said: "It's the women, Jerry—the vindictive dowagers who think that the leaders in the *Morning Post* are inspired by a clean-shaven God. . . ."

Old Townleigh said wearily: "Ambassador Page said to me the other day: 'The two things of eternal value in this island are the gardens and the men.' I

pointed out to him that to make gardens one must have manure and to make men one must have women."

How often Venetia had heard Black Petah say: "This Empire has been created by the insane energies of men, has been held by the craft of men, has been encompassed as with stone by the sanity of men. We have always been, we are, we shall always be a nation of men. . . ." And then maybe he would see her sitting thoughtfully with her listening face in some corner, and then maybe he would come and whisper to her with his dark twenty-year-old eyes: "Darling, what nonsense I talk!"

Serle despised and resented "ladies." He poured scorn upon them. Venetia had often wondered why, had wondered if he hadn't one day been snubbed by a lady. He would resent that, it would rankle, and he was so clever that he could make a lifelong religion out of a tiny rankle.

He said: "In this Irish question we have been consistently dictated to by the snobbery, vulgarity, and savagery of women of breeding. The female aristocrat of Great Britain is the *fine fleur* of illiteracy. The damned greyhounds! Hipless, bustless, useless. . . ."

Vardon said: "I agree. Nevertheless, I shall continue to prefer them slim."

Marjorie, glancing at Vardon with refined distaste, said bitterly: "Oh, father!"

Serle looked round at his only daughter. His face was shiny, his eyes cruel. Venetia said to herself: "Oh, Black Petah, now don't be rude to your nice daughter before me because it's so uncomfortable."

Serle merely said: "Marjorie goes to school in Paris where they turn out greyhounds by the dozen. An expensive process. . . ."

Venetia tried to catch Marjorie's eye and smile at her, but Marjorie was not having her eye caught. Venetia was absolutely helpless before dislike. She couldn't return dislike with any conviction. "Sour

as a quince she is," she thought helplessly, and left it at that.

Serle never sat down, was never still. When he spoke to a man there was so much contempt in his manner, in his lean sallow face, that a third person couldn't help being against him. . . .

Once, when she was very little, she had happened to go into the bathroom and Black Petah had been there standing under the shower. His back was to her, she had stared. That had been an important event in her life. Black Petah had never been the same man since. He had been nicer.

"He can talk and bully all he likes," she thought, "but when one comes to think that he has a mole the size of half a crown on the right side of his flank it is quite impossible somehow to take him as a grown-up man."

He said to old Townleigh: "Try to suggest a reform in the Public School system at any dinner-table in England, and it is the women who fly at once. It is as though Ulster and the Public School system were the two wheels of a chariot wrought by God to take 'ladies' and their children to His right hand where He sits in the only remaining club other than the Royal Yacht Squadron where upstarts are still blackballed. The question of education is vital to this Empire: yet it's governed by the snobbery of ignorant ladies. As for Ireland, I'd like to take a bet that at this moment, while every responsible man in London is racking his brains as to how to clear up this mess, their wives are sitting round tea-tables spitting death, damnation, loyalty, and Ulster. My wife will be doing it now, although she's more intelligent than most. Marjorie would certainly be if she weren't here. Venetia wouldn't, because she wasn't born a lady, thank God. Were you, Venetia?"

"Darling," she whispered presently, "don't be so unkind to Marjorie. So uncomfortable. . . ."

"She's such a snob, Venetia!"

While he, she thought in a muddled way, was more of a snob than anybody, because he was a snob about not having been born a gentleman. And that ill-fitting uniform was another angle of his particular snobbery. . . .

The deep depression of old Townleigh excited Venetia's compassion. Alas, it wasn't difficult to have a presentiment as to what had brought her dominating old friend so low. He loved his children with a jealous love. Michael had written to her at school not three weeks ago to say that he and Raphael were being sent out at last. Michael was nearly twenty and Raphael said he was nineteen, and they were both in the same battalion of the 60th. They were called "the Kosher Kids," Michael had gaily written to her. Dark, serious, good Michael, laughing Raphael, always in trouble. And terrified they both were of their father, who loved them with a jealous love.

They were talking of the conduct of the war. Serle was a bitter advocate of the single command. He said: "It's all right about France getting a swelled head. We can deal with her when the war's won."

Marjorie Serle said to her father: "We should be going home! It's eight. Mother will be wondering. The Sheltons are dining."

Venetia roamed vaguely about the large panelled room. Everything was dropping away from her to-night, dropping away, vanishing abruptly. So alone. She had been relying on dear Michael. Michael, Aunt Alice, Black Petah—three friends, an enormous and never-ending number of friends they had seemed. So comforting. She frantically caught at a sob that reached out to the dear memory of Aunt Alice. Why were women like that—so—so *rattled*! Why were men like that, kind and cruel, good and sinful? So silly. And the "strong men" were the weakest of all, their firm decisions popped right out of the weakness of

their characters. If a man hated another with a great hatred you could be pretty certain that it was because he had been touched in some weak spot. But they talked of principles. . . .

Venetia tried to put from her mind the horrid implication of Black Petah's horrid uniform. He couldn't really be a soldier, not a proper fighting soldier, in *that* uniform. Then she told herself severely that it was silly to feel lonely, it was more than silly, it was selfish to feel lonely in a world in which Michael might be killed and Raphael might be maimed at any moment and Aunt Alice had gone off all by herself. . . .

Marjorie Serle suddenly asked her: "Are you going to Paris this year! You'll like 'Ozannes,' we have great fun." Venetia said she was not going to Paris. Marjorie said: "Sheila Tetloe is coming this summer, and I think Mary Devon."

Peter's "greyhounds." . . .

Venetia reflected idly that Marjorie must often lie awake at nights shivering with anger at her father for having refused a title. And dear Black Petah was just as much a snob all by himself for having refused to be a lord. Oh dear. . . .

She wanted to ask Marjorie whether anything had happened to Michael or Raphael, but could not bring herself to form the words. Then she found herself near the great leather arm-chair in which old Townleigh was sprawling. He looked so sad, so hurt. She was awed by the majesty of suffering. He moved his arm a little so that she could sit on the arm of his chair. Venetia and old Townleigh had always been very good friends. Being a Jew, he had brought up his children with careful love, he had always strongly disapproved of Venetia's casual upbringing, he was convinced that Venetia would come to a bad end, but in the meanwhile he was very fond of her.

Venetia stroked the back of his hand, a great rough brown hand, the hand of Jerry Sass that had grasped

a fortune from mother earth. Suddenly he clasped hers. He was so gentle. She looked down on the massive desolate face, at the sorrowful eyes. He nodded, and said:

"Yes, Michael. Reported missing the other day. Now reported killed."

Of course, of course, it would be Michael, because he was pure and kind and obedient, and because his father loved him more than Raphael. . . .

Venetia knew nothing of the world. But it is well established that innocence is blessed, that angels illuminate the virtuous, and that knowledge perfumes the hearts of virgins. Thus it came about that Venetia saw into the mountainous old man who was become Lord Townleigh, how he was proud and arrogant, how he was governed by desire and prejudice, how he was vain and violent, and how the death of Michael was verily a punishment for his sins. Now he would only have Esther and Raphael, silky sulky Esther and laughing Raphael.

Marjorie cried out: "Daddy, it's past eight! We will be terribly late, and the Sheltons are dining——"

"Oh, damn the Sheltons!" said Serle.

Vardon said: "I agree. Better dine here."

"Lord Shelton," said old Townleigh, "is a genius. Only a genius could have made Bulgaria come in against us."

Marjorie jumped up. "Well, I'm going!" she said bitterly. She disapproved of Lord Townleigh and Mr. Vardon socially, and did not care if they knew it.

"Then, my child, be gone!" said her father with surprising gaiety. Venetia noticed that he would sometimes treat Marjorie like a little child. She suspected that treatment. Marjorie was very far from being a little child. *That* young lady! It was with a shock that Venetia suddenly realised that he did it on purpose, he forced it, for fear he might too unbearably dislike the young lady in Marjorie.

He vaguely put his arm round Marjorie as she went to the door. She looked sulky and bitter, but she was afraid of him. He said:

"I'd better stay here for dinner, as I shall only be rude to your Sheltons and thus ruin any immediate prospects you may have of a brilliant social career. Tell your mother to ring me up at Whitehall Court at about midnight. I'll probably stay there the night to clear up things and come round to say good-bye in the morning."

Marjorie ignored Venetia as she went out. Marjorie had acquired the habit of leaving rooms abruptly, as she had seen Sheila Tetloe and Mary Devon do.

Serle turned to Venetia. "I've resigned, Venetia. This frail body, whence have issued so many words and vanities, shall henceforth eject only words of war and agents of destruction."

"Darling, I can't believe it. So sudden. . . ."

He was smiling at her. His poor thin face, so shiny. He was smiling with all the darkness of his eyes.

"So sad," she added.

"Sad I'm going, Venetia?"

"Oh, Black Prince, how lonely I'll be!" Her eyes filled with tears. "No Aunt Alice. No Michael. Black Prince, isn't it *awful*!"

"Black Prince is new, isn't it!"

She blinked through her tears. "Promotion in honour of going to the wars."

"But look at me, Venetia! How unobservant you are! Don't you see that I'm a captain already? It's a serious position, a grave responsibility."

"But, darling, it's so bewildering! How did you get to be a captain straight away?"

"Influence. But I'm bound to say that I don't feel like a captain. Maybe the feeling will come later——"

"Oh, Black Prince, how miserable I am!" She tried to blink Michael's face from before her eyes.

"Darling, think of other things. For instance, look at my uniform!"

"It's beautiful, Petah! And you prefer wearing it like that, do you, back to front? Or doesn't it make any different to that uniform? . . . Sorry, darling!"

"I wear my uniform like this, Venetia, so as to bring the war Home to people. I bought it second-hand. I went into a shop in Covent Garden and I told various men that I was a captain. They didn't believe me for a moment, but men will do anything for money. . . ."

He went on talking nonsense. There were so many tears in her, so much weeping to be done. "I shall cry a lot later on," she promised herself. Blinking, she tried to smile into his harassed eager face. Those dark twenty-year-old eyes. . . .

"You've grown up so, Venetia!"

If he only knew, came the shadowy thought, how much she had grown up, and what a pity it was!

This last term at school she had wondered a lot about Michael. Beautiful Michael, so good and kind. He wrote her little bits of letters that had been like lights in the dark passage of her growing-up. She had wondered if she would marry Michael some day. . . .

"Wake up, Venetia! What are you thinking of, blinking away?"

"So sad, darling," she said, blinking. "Poor, poor Michael!"

He was staring at her, not smiling. His dark eyes looked unhappy. He needed comforting about something too, that was obvious. Apparently everybody needed comforting about something. Maybe that was the secret of life. What a life!

"He was your great friend, wasn't he?"

"Yes, darling. Greatest."

"Then me?"

"Oh, darling, different class!"

"That's not kind!" he said sharply.

She was astonished. "Black Prince, what do you

think I meant? Don't please be angry with me, don't please! I love you, I do! And you're my only friend now."

"Blinking away!" he said in a queer voice, trying to smile.

Then they laughed together. . . .

"When I come back," he said, "we'll be great friends, won't we?"

"Why, darling, haven't we been, always?"

"Yes, but now that you're grown up all the young men in the town will be after you, and you'll have no time for me."

She said seriously: "It disgusts me even to think of them."

"Splendid!" he said.

Why was he troubling to smile when he looked so tired, exhausted, haggard? But he would not give in, never. He must be forever doing, striving. He was striving even with her, now . . . being active mentally, striving with her about something. There was no tranquillity in him, none. Beads of perspiration glistened on his forehead. Of course, he probably hadn't taken any exercise for ages. Too busy winning the war. And now he was going, and they would not be able to play tennis for a long time. Peter played tennis with skill and judgment, but was angry when he lost. That was because he was not born a gentleman, and so Venetia forgave him, even as he forgave himself.

"No good," she thought vaguely, "can come of this soldiering. And that uniform has all the earmarks of an impending disaster."

"Anyway," she complained bitterly, "what does all this soldiering mean? So idiotic, darling."

"Blinking away," he said thoughtfully. "Do you know, Venetia, something has just struck me—that I have never really *seen* you before. I mean, I've known you for so long, you've always been, well, inevitable

. . . and now suddenly you're some one quite different. . . ."

She blinked. "Darling, you're question-evading. Why are you going for a soldier at your age——"

"The devil, I'm not a hundred!"

"But, darling, you're what's called *responsible*!"

"Oh!" he laughed, staring at her all the time.

"Wasn't the Cabinet comfortable enough for you, Petah! Was there a draught?"

"There was decidedly," he said seriously.

How he hated being disliked, really, how he *hated* it! And yet his manner courted it, and he pretended as hard as he could that people's dislike of him was the salt of his life. . . .

Michael had never pretended anything. But maybe as he grew up he would have found he had to. . . .

"It's a case of must," he added.

"Darling, tell me." She said it eagerly, because it was difficult to listen.

"Blinking away!" he laughed at her, and flung an arm about her shoulder. "How good it will be, Venetia, when I come back, to tell you things . . . things that will seem musty and dreary until we've had a good laugh at them together."

As they talked, he with his arm about her, they tottered about the room. Vardon and Townleigh were bending over some typewritten sheets.

Her eyes filled with tears. "But you *must* come back, Black Prince!"

"Oh, I will!" he grinned darkly.

"But about going at all, darling, why is it a case of *must*?"

"I was getting too unpopular, Venetia. As you know, I've never minded that, but this is war-time, one has to be a little more . . . accommodating. You see, it's rather different with the others. I'm what is called a 'professional' politician, and the word 'professional' is invariably used with contempt in England.

It's a serious handicap, I can tell you. Englishmen love an amateur, Venetia. They don't mind what you do, they'll even tolerate you doing something useful, they'll even forgive you for doing it very well, if only you look as though you were thinking of something else all the time. That's why they show a marked preference for being governed by gentlemen in their leisure hours. They love Balfour for that. Of course, it's all an air, a pose. For instance, Balfour has worked just as hard or harder in his time than any other politician, but he hasn't *looked* as though he was working. And besides, he's had money of his own, just as most of the others have. In England it's considered the height of bad form to make a living at politics, and a politician is looked upon with suspicion if he hasn't money of his own——"

She was amazed. "But, Black Prince, money! Haven't you lots?"

"Oh, lots!" he mocked her.

"But . . ." She sighed, thinking of the swift motor-cars, of Marjorie among her "greyhounds," of Mrs. Serle's dinner-parties that she had heard of. . . .

"Not a penny, Venetia! Credit, yes—but money, I mean real money, no. We've lived, or tried to, on my salary as a Minister for years." He added, "Oh, bother money! Your father and old Jerry are the men to make that stuff, Venetia. I can't, never could, and never can be bothered about *that*. . . ."

She tried to think of money. She was very vague about money. Mammon. She couldn't visualise it, except that it didn't look like Michael. . . .

"Darling, tell me more about this beastly soldiering."

"It's very simple, Venetia. I have to find myself a background. You may well blink. But in England, you see, everybody must have a background—either born with him or acquired later. And the background, darling, must have nothing whatever to do with the

job that a man's best at. That is absolutely essential. And where do I come in? Nowhere. Whereas all the others have backgrounds, and nice definite ones, quite apart from politics and party. For instance, F.E. is a great lawyer, Churchill has a *name* and writes books —confoundedly good ones—and plays polo and wears hats, Asquith is a scholar and Mrs. Asquith's husband, Lloyd George is a Welshman, and to be anything but English in England is a background and a career in itself, and so on. Well, you can see how I stand. No background, darling. I'm nobody's son, I'm not even a Jew, or a Colonial, I'm nothing but an Englishman who was an obscure journalist and became—with your father's help, God bless him—a politician. You see, Venetia? If I could become a Jew or something here and now, that would do well enough. But as I can't, I've got to go soldiering. . . ."

"But, darling, you'll make such a rotten soldier! So disobedient."

He laughed. "I shall obey my destiny, Venetia."

"And get killed, just to show off! Oh, darling!"

"Now *there's* an idea, if you like! The most popular background of all would be to get killed. Death has always commanded great popularity in England. Time and again a man's reputation has been entirely made by dying. An Englishman loves a dead man."

"Black Prince, don't laugh at death!"

"I've changed my mind about it now, anyhow. I shan't die, Venetia. I shall live to be a very old man, a grand old man. Now *there's* the best background of all, old age. To be very old in England is a successful career in itself. Look at the people who would have been forgotten if they hadn't lived to a good old age —Queen Victoria, Thomas Hardy, Harry Preston, Balfour, and so on. And poor old Wellington had to live almost forever to regain the popularity he lost by not dying at Waterloo. Oh, yes, I shall be very popular when I'm eighty, Venetia, just for being eighty."

"Yes, darling. And how you will like that, how you will enjoy that!" she said bitterly, and he darted a sharp look at her, almost frightened of her he seemed to be, but she did not explain anything, thinking to herself what a funny game of humbug it all seemed to be.

Peter was murmuring: "It's true, though. Until a public man is seventy he's called 'self-interested,' but from then onwards he's called 'disinterested' for ever after. . . ."

Presently, when dinner was over, she slipped away to bed. Venetia's bedroom was high above Brook Street, and from her windows she could see the trees of Grosvenor Square. She turned out the lights and stood at the open window. London was very dark, very still, empty. Her own loneliness seemed to flutter from her and enter the dark city. Thoughts and faces mingled painfully with the black brooding shadows of the trees in the Square.

Trellis had given her a letter from Aunt Alice, the beautiful lady. It was one of those impersonal letters that hurt. Alice Craven wrote:

A friend of mine, Mrs. Winthrop, is interested in a Mission in the East End. They try and find jobs for boys and girls, give them advice about how to get to the Colonies, try to amuse and interest them, and so on. I've felt for a long time the desire to be doing something. I shall live down there if there's room for me. The address is The Cobden Settlement, Peter Street, Canning Town, E. I suppose you will be lonely at first without me, but, dear Venetia, I have considered this step very carefully and can't see what else I could *do. I will come to see you one day and we'll have a nice long talk. And, dear child, you will always be very welcome here, though I'm afraid it is not a very amusing place to visit. God bless you and keep you.*

Your always loving, ALICE.

Those were the words that Aunt Alice had written. But the words that Venetia actually read were:

"An angel of the Lord came to me years ago and told me I was living sinfully. I tried not to listen, for I loved your father, and I loved you, and this easy life. But with the war he came back more vividly, calling me to repent and to live a clean, useful life. I'm afraid I can't help you any more, Venetia. You are the daughter of your father and the child of your surroundings. You will remain good so long as you remember how to be lonely. But your beauty will destroy you if you give it the smallest chance. Mine destroyed me. We must go different ways, for I'm not strong enough to help you, but you are dear enough to me to be able to influence me. That is why I never want to see you again.—ALICE CRAVEN."

Venetia thought painfully: "No good can come from this repentance business. Aunt Alice is too beautiful and too good to stick it out. Only hard-hearted people can stick to being repentant. Some one will fall in love with her, and she'll be sorry for him, and there she'll be again!"

Venetia stood at the open window for a long time. Her melancholy grew far beyond the childish vocabulary of her thoughts. She stood on the frontiers of sadness like a forlorn outpost of a world that was full of childish things. Years later she was to recall this moment as the first in which she had realised, ever so dimly, that life is too big for men and women to live.

Presently a car dashed into Brook Street from Davies Street and up to the door. It was an open Government car driven by a girl in khaki. A staff-officer jumped out and was met by Peter coming out of the house. She heard his mocking voice: "Hello, Wilson! What's happened to the air-raid you promised us for to-night?" Presently she heard her father's voice at the door behind her asking if he might come

in. He was wearing a rough tweed overcoat. Wilfred simply stormed about the room.

"Spain?" she said, remembering.

"Yes, crossing to-night. I'll be back in a week or so."

She tried to blink back her tears, but they welled up in her eyes.

"Michael," she explained. But she meant everything, everything.

Vardon said: "You'll be lonely here all by yourself. Why don't you go and stay with old man Townleigh? Cheer him up. He's been hard hit. And Esther is giving him a lot of trouble. A great *deal* of trouble. Or why not have some of your friends come to stay with you?"

Venetia sat helplessly on the edge of the bed. She wanted to go on crying for ever.

"Friends are no good," she said.

Surprising man. He said: "I agree."

She said vaguely: "I'll try for one of those motor-driving jobs."

"Old Townleigh can help you there," he said.

They stared at each other. They were friends. The sort of friends who never make any attempts to see each other, but are glad when they do.

Aunt Alice walked about the room, but not between them. They *knew* about Aunt Alice. Poor Aunt Alice. She thought life was just a simple business of sin and repentance. . . .

"I wonder," Venetia said, "what will happen to Aunt Alice. I'm sorry for her. . . ."

Vardon said: "You're too young to be sorry for people, Venetia. Better keep that till later. It will cause you trouble enough."

If Venetia had not been positive that her father was a bad man she would have sometimes thought he was a very good one.

DINNER-PARTIES in those days were usually rather scratchy affairs. That was only decent, it was felt. Mrs. Serle's little dinner-party, however, was just a little too "scratchy" for her taste. Everybody seemed to be wanting to scratch everybody else. Handsome Lord Shelton on her right seemed restive, almost uncomfortable. He was too much of a gentleman to abuse hospitality by looking disapproving, but he couldn't help, poor man, looking as though he would like to look disapproving. Muriel Serle understood. She had had, in her married life, so many opportunities for understanding.

"I read in this evening's paper that you were sailing for America very soon, Lord Shelton?"

"For Allied propaganda." He added, with that proconsular smile of his that seemed somehow to imply that he, anyhow, still preferred playing cricket in no matter how difficult a situation: "Your husband might say, Mrs. Serle, that nothing that even I can do there can make America come in against us."

Mrs. Serle understood. She could imagine Peter's bitter criticisms of the poor man's failure in the wretched Balkans. Some of them must have come round to the poor man.

On her left Colonel Boyscrofts was, as usual, quiet, judicious, pleasant. Basil Boyscrofts was, in her experience, one of the few regular soldiers who did not talk too much. It was the last night of his leave. He was an old friend, yet to-night she found herself noticing as though for the first time the crisp way his greying curly hair was brushed back from his temples. He had fine brown eyes, absurdly wicked-looking eyes for such a good little man. She always thought of him as "the little man." She was apt to think of people in terms which, had they been uttered by someone else, would have irritated her profoundly.

Pretty, charming, timid Lady Shelton looked at her hostess with adoring eyes and told Marjorie a long fluttering story about the glories of Ascot in 1913. Muriel Serle was relieved to see the nice silly woman's sympathetic interest in Marjorie. That was why she had asked the Sheltons. She might take the girl under her wing and introduce her to her nice silly friends. Now that Marjorie was growing up her mother was anxiously facing the difficulties of pleasing a girl with her social tastes and a father who rejoiced in the antagonism of every lady and gentleman in London.

The conversation thus fell almost entirely to Savile, the writer. He tossed it about casually, too casually. He was very young in years, had been severely wounded, and his war-novel was selling by tens of thousands. People were taking him up, and he seemed to be enjoying himself with great self-confidence. He was a slim, rather exquisite young man with heavy features and insolent brown eyes. He used them rather too often. He looked at women straight in the eyes and did not seem to care whether they liked him or not. Muriel Serle had recently heard that on the whole they did—the commoner, wilder ones. No one, it was said, liked him at first, but he appeared, like John Wilkes, to have some powers of persuasion. Even so, however, some people could not politely bear the sight of him. He talked a lot of nonsense at random, rather dangerous sort of nonsense about the war. Lord Shelton said sharply: "Oh, come!" when young Savile told a story of how, at a happy dinner at Headquarters in France, a tipsy English Colonel had clapped a willing Frenchman on the shoulder, saying: "My friend, we have been enemies on land and sea for nearly a thousand years. Nothing has ever really brought us together, neither treaties nor our common advantage—until now. So let us drink to our glorious alliance, for we are at long last united in a common hatred for Belgium."

Savile, to Mrs. Serle's relief, had to leave before dinner was quite over, for duty at the Press Bureau. That, although he interested her, was the last time he dined at Mrs. Serle's. It had occurred to her, whilst he was talking with the obvious intention of provoking poor proconsular Lord Shelton, that it was quite uncomfortable enough to have one man who was proud of not being born a gentleman always in the house without asking another to dine.

The Sheltons left soon afterwards, Lady Shelton prettily asking her hostess if she could bring Marjorie to luncheon one day.

It was almost midnight when Muriel Serle herself saw Colonel Boyscrofts to the door. They stood together in the doorway. It was a close night, a fine rain falling. He was very shy, not looking at her but at the glistening street. The little man. She was slightly the taller. Her prematurely white hair lent her an air of great dignity. Muriel Serle had often been told of her dignity. She was very tired of hearing about that dignity, convinced as she was in herself that dignity is but a superficial thing, that there was more "dignity" in her hair than in her heart, and that a great many married women of her age were just hungry young innocents inside, no matter how calm and dignified they might look. Mrs. Serle was thirty-eight. Her friends respected her, she inspired them with sympathy and confidence. Some even dared to be sorry for her, in the certainty that she would never embarrass them by showing that she was sorry for herself.

Her grey eyes rested on the little man with intense affection.

"I am going to miss you so much, Basil! More than ever. . . ."

He still stared straight in front of him. "What a mess it's been, hasn't it, Muriel?"

"Not quite that, dear. There's been, there is, *something*. . . . !"

"The silly things one says!" she desperately thought.

"Oh, yes, something . . . of course!"

She said helplessly: "And for the rest, I suppose, with people like us . . ."

"Like you, you mean, Muriel." He was looking at her now with his fine eager eyes that so queerly contradicted his passive solitary character. The little man. "I've done all *I* could, Muriel. Always. You only had to say the word."

She could not face the knowledge in herself that their friendship had been one long cruelty to him, a using of him. That was what it had been. She could not face it. She had to pretend to herself that he had always known how things stood, that she had never let him hope for anything but friendship. . . .

He suddenly smiled into her troubled face.

"I know what you're thinking, Muriel. But it's all *right*. Don't worry."

"But I do worry a little about . . . well, thinking perhaps that I've sometimes given you an idea that I . . ."

"You've been absolutely honest from the beginning——"

"Oh!"

"Why, what did I say?"

"You said that 'beginning' as though this was the ending!"

He went on: "You've never for a moment given me any idea that you even so much as considered breaking your bargain with Serle."

She smiled faintly. The little man. He was the miserable one, and he was trying to comfort her. . . .

"But it really *is* odd," he said thoughtfully, "when one comes to think it out. Men like me—you know, no particular good, but just harmless—are pretty usually on the wrong side of a bargain, while men like Serle—and probably that clever feller, Savile—usually have an angel sacrificing everything for them. Odd, say what you like. . . ."

She said: "I'll go and see your mother to-morrow, shall I?"

"Oh, yes, do! She will love that. Good-bye, Muriel, for a little time."

As he turned away her eyes filled with tears, for she knew that it would be for ever. At that moment an open Government car drew up at the curb with a skid, and Serle jumped out, saying "good-night" to a staff-officer sitting behind.

"Hello, Boyscrofts, just going?"

"Must, I'm afraid. I have to be up early. Good-night, Serle."

She loved him for the effort he had made to answer courteously the one man in the world he hated with his whole heart. The little man. . . .

In the hall she drew back a little way from Peter.

"Muriel, such a day!"

He looked so untidy, shiny, grubby, haggard.

"Marjorie told me you weren't coming home to-night."

"I changed my mind. Say you're glad."

"I was hurt when I heard you weren't coming home on your last night."

He followed her into her bedroom. She wondered, as she sat at her dressing-table, how long it was since he had last been in her room at night. He seldom came home, if at all, until the small hours. She took off her imitation pearls. One day, when he had the money, he was to give her real pearls. She had longed for them ever since she was a girl. He lounged about the room. So tired he looked, but always wide-awake. How tired he would be one day, tired unto death with all the accumulated tirednesses of his snatching life!

"Boyscrofts going back soon?"

She was faintly surprised, for he never showed any interest in her friends.

"To-morrow."

Then she smiled to herself as she realised that he had

only asked for something to say. He lounged about restlessly. Poor Peter, he was searching for something to say.

"Tired, Muriel?"

"Not particularly, dear."

"Well, while you get into bed I'll have a bath—I feel foul—and then come in and talk to you."

As he went out, she called: "Oh, Peter! You know I don't like you to take Marjorie to that house. And she hates it, too."

He stared. "Why, doesn't she like Venetia?"

"Well," she said vaguely, "I suppose girls have different tastes. . . ."

He did not answer, but closed the door behind him with a sharp click.

As she lay in bed waiting for him she found that the tears would come crowding to her eyes. She could hear the splash of the shower in his bathroom upstairs. She must not cry, for he would think she was crying about him, he was so insensitive that he would do poor Basil even out of her tears without a second's thought. How mean she had been to keep Basil hanging on these five years, how mean! But one hurt she had saved the little man, anyhow. He had always been quite certain, and sort of happy in his unhappy uncertainty, that had she been a different kind of woman, the "modern" kind who could change from one man to another—he had that nice out-of-date kind of mind—she would have managed to divorce Peter and marry him. And she had let him go on thinking that. It would have hurt the little man unbearably if she had ever let him see that in spite of everything, but everything, in spite of her admiration for his character and her knowledge of Peter's almost intolerable selfishness—that she preferred Peter, that in a queer frightening humiliating way she loved Peter, that he still thrilled her, the idea and the touch of him still had the power to thrill her as though she was a silly girl. Why, why, why? Why

after all these years should she feel like that about Peter . . . while he, poor man, could only with the greatest effort bring himself to kiss her in any but a brotherly way? And she was supposed to be cold, impassive! "Cold and dignified" she looked. That was how, thank Heaven, the little man thought of her, as a cold woman tied to an insensitive egotist who neglected her. The foolish words people used about one! That was how every one thought of her, except Peter. He knew. It was intolerable, humiliating, but he knew. He had known years and years ago, soon after they were married. And although men forget physical things so easily, he had remembered that. He used to laugh at her on the honeymoon. The silly names! "My passionate bride." They used to laugh together. "My purple lily." But things go, things go. Men change. Soon her passion had distressed him, made him shy. It did still, after all these years. It kept him from coming to her, it intervened between them in a thousand ways, it was an awful secret between them. They both remained, in their different ways, so young, so untired! What idiotic law was it that governed our unalterable tastes, that she who detested almost everything about a man—his manners, his sharp strident discourtesies, his self-seeking, his casualness to her, his boastful ungentlemanliness—that she should have a physical feeling of repulsion at the idea of being touched by any man but him? And he knew it, was distressed by it, it was the only thing in his life that had ever made him feel and look shy. She, if she loved him at all, should love him with contempt—whereas he actually loved her with pity! Why should the perfectly natural love of a wife for her husband instantly become something called "sex" when it isn't equally felt on both sides? Poor Peter, it had been, was, difficult for him. She was the only person in his life with whom he had tried to "behave." And that trying of his was intolerable, hu-

miliating to her. She had understood from other women that it was the men who, in these things, were usually the demanding ones. Sometimes her friends complained of the demands made on them. But she had so little to complain of . . . except herself. How she hated herself sometimes, how her desires degraded her, soiled her. And she prayed to God to expel the beast from her body. Peter was made differently. He had tried to explain to her, years and years ago, as the lover of her dreams merged into a shy distressed man, that he wasn't, couldn't be, that it wasn't in him to be, a passionate lover, scarcely a lover at all. Some men were and some men weren't, he had pathetically tried to explain. And that was the truth about himself, she had known that, the truth so far as he knew it. She was quite positive that he hadn't been unfaithful to her. Unfaithful. . . . What an idiotic word, when it had no beautiful opposite! He wasn't, the point was, grown up at all in one way. Suppose, one day, something happened, some one, and he grew up. . . . She hoped that she would be old by then, she often longed to be old now, to have done with this wretchedly spurious youth of middle years whose demands weren't shaped by the fine conviction and confidence of youth. . . .

He came in, looking scrubbed, exhaling soap and Kolynos. He sat on the edge of the bed, not very near her. He fingered the fluffy pink bedspread of marabou.

"Pretty, this. New, isn't it?"

"I've had it nearly a year, dear. . . . Do you think it strange or natural, Peter, that somehow I don't feel in the least bit anxious about you?"

He smiled sharply. "Natural, Muriel. The Serles of life don't get killed."

Yes, he was right in that. Whereas the Boyscrofts of life . . .

She knew every expression of his lean aggressive face. His blank vague smile. . . . He was "trying."

Poor Peter. His vanity was so strong that he wouldn't allow his married life to collapse into a complete failure . . . but his nerves held him back, his nerves just thrust her away from him. He was so pitiable in intimacy, so uncertain, so lost. He didn't know how to be intimate. But he tried his best. That pitiable "trying." . . .

Suddenly she could not bear it, his sitting there vaguely, trying.

"Peter, it's one o'clock, and you have to be up so early. Go to bed, dear."

The trouble seemed to scurry out of his eyes. He smiled at her over a half-stifled yawn.

"God, yes, I *am* dead tired!"

He rose to go. She could see him forcing himself to linger, not to seem too eager to be alone on his last night. So pitiable, so pathetic. She began to laugh weakly.

"What is it, Muriel?"

As she laughed the tears welled up in her eyes.

"Oh, Peter, Peter!"

Impulsively, clumsily, he bent over her.

"Darling Muriel, how wonderful you are to me—and I'm such an unfeeling brute!"

He held her to him, not closely, his hands vaguely playing with her nightdress.

She heard a high hysterical voice crying: "Go away, Peter, go away! For God's sake, why do you *try* so hard! You don't have to. . . ."

And then the pride flowed out of her like blood from a wound, and the poor man could not go because she clung to him so tightly.

And that went on, the bits of love shadowed by shame, until the blessed time came when things did not matter so much to Muriel Serle. And always people said of her: "How cold and dignified she is!"

DURING her father's absence in Spain—no one ever gave Vardon the credit for the dangerous intelligence work he did all over Europe—Venetia went to stay with old Townleigh. He promised to get her a job as driver of one of the War Office motor-cars. She was a capable driver. He said wearily: "Yes, yes, my child, you must work. Splendid."

Old Townleigh's house was a grand one in Berkeley Square, furnished throughout in the quietest, most exquisite taste. That had been Esther's doing, Esther had always been the artistic one. But Esther was not in the house when Venetia arrived. Esther was not living at home. Esther had not been living at home for some time. Venetia was dumbfounded. The old man never mentioned her name.

Lady Esther Sass was by some years the oldest of the Sass children. And as Venetia was by two years younger than the youngest, Raphael, she had never known Esther at all well. She had always been afraid of Esther, she was so strangely and darkly and passionately contemptuous of all the things that seemed important to other people. Her speaking voice was lovely, a silky sulky thing.

Venetia wished she had stayed at home in Brook Street. Those were gloomy days in England, very gloomy days in the grand house in Berkeley Square. Michael was dead. Oh Michael, *Michael*! Young Lord Archery. Michael Archery. He was dead. And Raphael—now Raphael Archery—was at the front. And Esther was not living at home any more.

The house in Berkeley Square was a busy house, full of busy people. There were typists, secretaries, editors, men, women, what-nots. There was a detective always hanging around the old man, going out when he went out, coming in when he came in. His name was Munro-Parker, a name that was somehow a bright light in

those gloomy days. Mr. Havelock was quite a different affair. Mr. Havelock was chief leader-writer to the old man's morning papers, he was his master's voice, and he lived in the house the better to be at hand to write down any thought of importance that came into his master's head. There were other leader-writers, of course, but Mr. Havelock was the chief one, a quiet thin nice man flitting about from room to room, usually with a blank sheet of paper fluttering from his hand. Sometimes he smelt rather strongly of her old friend Wilfred, Venetia thought, but he was nice. Then there was another man, a little one called Mr. Armitage, an anxious-looking little man who was always being shouted for. Poor Mr. Armitage had a lot to be anxious about, Venetia gathered. It was his duty, every morning and every evening, to make a summary of *all* the news from *all* the London newspapers and read out his summary to the old man. If there was any item of any importance whatsoever in one of the papers which was not also in one of the old man's papers, it was poor Mr. Armitage's business to point that out to the old man, and then God help some one in Fleet Street.

After the old man, Seabright was the most important person in the house. Mr. Havelock could not be important, he was nice. Seabright was the butler. He was a very bald, very brown, very sharp-faced little old man who looked more like a bookmaker than a butler. He was not nice and did not want to be nice. He never spoke unless he had to, and then he spoke without courtesy. Every one except the old man hated the sight of him. Mr. Havelock was afraid of him. Venetia tried never to look in his direction. It was Seabright who told her about Esther. But he had answered to her timid question as to where Lady Esther was nothing more than: "I have not an idea, Miss Venetia. Her ladyship's not living at home any more, that's all I know. Her maid comes round for

her letters." And he had eyed her balefully, as good as to say: "And good riddance! Ladyship? Slut!"

Venetia wished Black Petah hadn't so recklessly gone off to find his silly background, for he could have explained to her what was the *matter* with them all, why Seabright was so baleful, why poor Uncle Jerry was so unhappy with a sinister unhappiness that couldn't be entirely accounted for by Michael's death. But all she had heard from Black Petah was a telegram from Dover on the day he had left: *Please give Havelock best photograph you have got he will know how to reach me also write me long letters I can see already everything going to be foul until I see you and London again God bless you child Petah.*

Then one afternoon she saw Esther. Esther was in deep black and was carrying a white bundle in her arms. What an extraordinary thing, Venetia thought. And she was astounded at not having heard of Esther's marriage.

She was in the house one afternoon looking vaguely out of an upstairs window when she saw Esther alighting from a taxi at the door. Her mourning for Michael was the blackest thing Venetia had ever seen. Esther did not bother about fashions, she dressed as it pleased her. Esther was the artistic one. But why carry a baby about in her arms, what a thing to do! That motherly feeling, Venetia thought. She was looking down, so she could not see Esther's face. She wanted to call Esther's attention to herself, but was afraid she might be as sour as a quince. Esther always terrified her. However, she called down:

"Esther! Oi, up here! Hello, Esther!"

Esther looked up at her. How beautiful she was when she smiled, like a goddess of war. And that lovely voice, silky sulky.

"Why, child, what are you doing here?"

"I'm just staying here a few days because, you see, there's nobody at home. Esther, shall I come downstairs and talk to you?"

The silky sulky voice came drawling up: "You better hadn't, child. This is a very official visit." And she held up the white bundle, laughing with her strong brilliant teeth. "Look, Venetia! Here's another Michael Sass."

Then Esther vanished indoors. Venetia wondered what Sass it could be whom Esther had married, she had never heard of any other Sasses. So mysterious, so unnecessarily hostile, everything seemed to be. "Official visit." Oh indeed, oh indeed! A few minutes later another taxi drove up to the door and two young men in uniform got out. One was an officer, a "natty" one, and the other, a very tall thin man, was a private soldier. That was odd too, their being together, but as all sorts and conditions of men were driving up to that house every minute of the day Venetia paid no attention to those two and would not have known them again. But she stayed at the window to watch Esther come out. She came out quickly, baby and all. The two men were with her too, the "natty" officer and the long thin soldier. The backs of all of them looked so serious, and Venetia did not dare call out again. Esther vanished into her waiting taxi. Venetia heard the silky sulky voice call out: "Good-bye, Freddy and Charles, bless you!" Then the taxi rattled off and the two men walked away in opposite directions.

Neither Venetia nor old Townleigh was ever to see Esther again. Esther was the artistic one.

VENETIA was to hear of Aunt Alice once again. What she heard confirmed her worst fears. The Angel of the Lord had apparently suffered yet another setback in his long and glorious but chequered history.

Venetia was nineteen, a long-limbed slender girl. She tried to do her best for everybody. She tried to

placate, to soothe. There was, she found, a lot of placating, of soothing, to be done in the world. And that was all she was good for, to placate, to soothe. She did it with silences, because she wasn't clever and wouldn't risk saying much. But she managed her silences beautifully, she was proud of her silences, she had perfected them, and now they were full of a quiet but not too pressing attention. All sorts of men came to talk to her silences. They talked. One day, looking into the mirror, she fancied that her eyes had grown larger, they were so large. Maybe, she fancied, that had come from looking at people with quiet but not too pressing attention. One day, she promised herself, she would begin talking too. There must be something in it, she thought, as so many people did it. "And when I begin!" she thought.

The man from whom Venetia heard about Aunt Alice was the first man she had ever actually disliked. He spoilt a charming afternoon. He made her feel what she had always found other people feeling at the slightest distresses, as sour as a quince. She was not aware of ever before having felt as sour as a quince. His name was Savile. He was the sort of man who does not have a Christian name for a long time and never has a nickname. So far as Venetia was concerned, he would not have a Christian name for a very long time indeed.

It was the early summer of 1918. The war was roaring like ten million madmen. Something very odd had happened to the Fifth Army. Englishmen had been wounded in the back. People talked of foul play. A fundamental principle in English military thought is that when and where an English soldier has been wounded in the back an English civilian must have been up to foul play *somewhere*.

Peter was bringing some men down to Lacey Moat to play tennis on the hard court. Peter had left the army with as good a background as anybody could

wish for. Venetia had fancied that it must be irritating to any number of worthy men to see the hero, Colonel Serle, D.S.O., limp back into the Cabinet with a contemptuous look that now embraced soldiers as well as civilians. He had been wounded in the thigh. But just to be annoying he pretended that he had never been near the firing-line at all, but had slipped on a banana in the Rue Cambon in Paris.

Vardon had bought the property of Lacey Moat from de Travest two years before. It lay on a hill to the north of London, over the farthest heights of Hampstead, a long white house of many windows set in a small park packed tight with great trees. Owing to the shortage of gardeners the lawns about the house were a little raggedy and flowers were getting into the habit of growing anywhere they liked. Venetia, who was not a specialist in anything, liked that. After two solid years of driving Red Tabs about London she had been given a week's rest. She was too thin, she needed a lot of food and sleep. She lay on a deck-chair on the lawn to the south side of the house. Somewhere near her 5.15 lay and slumbered. 5.15 was a sort of wire-haired terrier, and he had been christened 5.15 by young Raphael because Raphael said he had been born at midnight and midnight was no time for a young dog to be out. It was a beautiful day. It would have been a very beautiful day but for that young man Savile.

Before they had come she had almost fallen asleep in the sunlight. But now, it was not the quick tattoo of hard-court tennis to her right that was keeping her awake. It was that young man Savile. He gave her a feeling that he would be what Raphael called a tiger in a taxi. As it was, his eyes pounced. He was one of those . . . beasts.

By turning her head just a little she could see them through the trees, the gesticulating white figures on the red court, and she could hear them only too clearly. Peter, Davies—the tennis-professional resident at Lacey

Moat to give Jasper Vardon exercise when he came home from the City—and the two young men whom Peter had brought, were playing. It seemed to be rather a grim affair. There would be money in it possibly. Peter always put a lot of antagonism into anything he played; and when he lost, he was furious, and he showed that he was furious. But to every man his own eccentricities, was Venetia's view of life. Besides, she had a way of not noticing the distressing things about her friends, and was inclined to be extremely surprised when other people remarked on them. The things that mattered most about a man to people who did not know him—would either cease to exist or not matter at all when they did get to know him. Why didn't people realise that before saying nasty things?

Now and then she heard that young man Savile's voice crying out the score or arguing with Peter. Obviously that young man Savile didn't mind who overheard him at any time in his life. And she disapproved of the way he was setting himself up against Peter, annoying Peter. It was so easy to annoy Peter, a decent person wouldn't try.

She had disapproved of him the very first moment when, on opening her eyes, she had seen him before her and had heard Peter casually introducing him. Savile, the writer. It was as though, on that fine summer day, in that sweet clean air, London had suddenly propelled itself over the heights of Hampstead to give her, quite suavely, a slap across the face. Savile was London. He looked London, he talked London, he wrote London. He had a waist, a smile, an air. His white flannels fell so beautifully that Venetia was surprised and disappointed to see that he could play tennis very well. She consoled herself by deciding that he played like an Argentine. He and the other young man, one of those young men whose face one would never notice and whose surname one

would never know, seemed to be doing what they liked with Peter and Davies. Peter, even from the distance, looked dark, furious. It was one of those days when every one became a quince. She could hear him every now and then sharply claiming that balls were "out" or "on the line." Peter had not very good eyesight. She could see, was dumbfounded to see from the tired way in which Savile flatly contradicted him, that Savile was having the *impudence* to let the world know that Peter was getting on *his* nerves!

She had read the man's stories, they were the stories of a young man who never made a fool of himself. Now that she had met him, she was certain that he was convinced he could never make a fool of himself. And the lovely summer afternoon was completely spoilt for her by an urgent desire for Savile to make a fool of himself.

He had cool, confident brown eyes that seemed to be mocking you, but you could never quite catch them at it. You could never quite catch him at anything. He was polished, so polished, but on the other hand Venetia was quite annoyed to see that his manners were not good enough to be irritating. In point of fact, polished or no, he could be quite rude, contradicting, interrupting. Everything about him was exactly in the right proportion and well-cut, except his features; they looked as though they ought to have belonged to a much taller and heavier man, whereas Savile was medium-sized and slender. Those features gave him an oddly heavy brooding look when he was not talking. He looked almost unhappy, almost unsure, when he wasn't talking—but, good Heavens, when was that?

He had managed to tell her a good deal about himself in the few minutes they had alone together before the game began. He had been wounded early in 1916, not too badly but badly enough for his future comfort in war-time. And all the time, as he spoke,

those cool confident brown eyes had seemed, in the queerest way, to be judging himself from exactly her point of view. That was disconcerting, as Venetia had made up her mind that he was very conceited. Of course he was very conceited. But it wasn't much fun disliking a man who disliked himself. She decided that she must be wrong. He didn't disapprove of himself at all. The man positively loved himself.

He had said: "It's entirely due to Serle's influence that I was allowed off this afternoon. Serle's a wonderful man. It's nice of you to let us come to this lovely place. I haven't played tennis for ages. Is Serle good?"

She said Peter was inclined to be erratic. And his game leg did not help him much.

He said: "One admires him enormously for having gone to the front. How he must have hated it!"

She wondered if he was laughing at Peter. He was up to anything. Whenever he said anything, no matter how nice, one wasn't certain if he hadn't something else to say too, something sarcastic. She hated sarcasm with the same sort of hatred with which she hated soiled linen.

The others had gone into the house to change. Savile had come down in white flannels. He would. Such beautiful white flannels. Pleated trousers bulging out from a tightly-compressed waist. As though he was going to have a baby. Smart. Oh dear, *smart*!

She said not a word about his books. They were clever, smart, glittering, and she couldn't bear them, though to her surprise she found herself reading each one as it was published. They were about lords and champagne and women who went to bed with men before you could say knife. But somehow there always seemed to be a jeer at the author himself somewhere in them.

She said: "I hear of you now and then from my father, Mr. Savile. He says that you and he . . ."

She thought: "Well, that's enough to be going on with. . . ."

He apparently agreed with her, saying: "The Ministry of Information is a wonderful place, Miss Vardon. It was Lord Townleigh who advised me to apply for a job there, as he said it would be good training for me if I wanted to write fiction. But I'm afraid your father doesn't take it very seriously. Like all great financiers, he is superstitious. He enjoys life late at night and puts his faith in God to see that the other man makes a fool of himself by getting up early."

Venetia was thinking: "This is all very well, but this young man isn't taking the slightest notice of what he's saying; he's *up* to something quite different."

She said: "Yes, my father says——"

Savile laughed. He laughed right into her eyes, suddenly, for a second, claiming every bit of her. She thought: "Yes, he's at last decided that I'm quite attractive. No good can come from this young man."

He was saying: "Yes, we were all up most of last night wondering what the devil we could send out about that affair at S——. We couldn't say the truth, of course. The British public can't have any nonsense about even a few British soldiers turning their backs on an overwhelming enemy, exactly as the French or German publics can't have any nonsense about a few of their soldiers turning their backs on an overwhelming enemy. The Austrians and Italians are more resigned. They say: 'What is bravery against mathematics?' and run like the devil. So we had to make up an entirely different battle from the one that took place. And naturally we did that pretty well, and won it too, as none of us are professional soldiers."

Venetia laughed: "Ha, ha!"

"Listen, Miss Vardon. Ever since Goliath was beaten by plucky little David there has been at the very heart of patriotism and of all fiction a fixed idea that the world will go to blazes if a big man should ever by

any chance get the better of a little man from beginning to end. When the war's over I'm going to try and write a novel with a really original plot. It's the only original plot left. In my novel the big man will give the little man a sound thrashing. After all, a good licking has been coming to the little man for ten thousand years or more."

A curious idea had been running up and down Venetia's mind. It was silly, but it compelled her attention. It was, that the man at her side wasn't talking at all. Some one labelled "Savile, the writer" was talking, but there was someone else there, a young man with truthful brown eyes who was saying in a hurt voice to "Savile, the writer": "For God's sake, shut up! Why won't you ever shut up, you fool!"

Peter was calling to Savile to begin the game. They were on the court, knocking up. As Savile rose he caught sight of a book on the grass by Venetia's chair. She had been reading it earlier in the afternoon. He picked it up, a well-worn copy of *Tono-Bungay.* It fell open in his hand, and she saw him start. It was one of the many novels Aunt Alice had left behind, and all were inscribed with a sprawling *Alice Craven* in pencil.

She asked quickly: "Do you know Mrs. Craven?"

"Yes . . . a little. She's lovely, isn't she?"

He put the book down, as though that was that, and was about to go. But Venetia couldn't restrain her interest. Dear Aunt Alice!

"But have you seen her lately? In the East End?"

Savile looked actually disconcerted for a moment.

"Oh, no, in Paris, about a year ago. She had a little flat there . . . but I must be going!"

He went. She was enormously distressed, but tried to laugh at herself, at Aunt Alice, at that strange worldly young man who allowed himself to be disconcerted. It was the only nice thing about him, his being disconcerted like that. Poor Aunt Alice! So the flame

of life had caught her again. And how unhappily, Venetia was positive. "No good could possibly come from that young man!" she decided. She couldn't tell why she was so certain about Aunt Alice and Savile, the beautiful soft lady and the confident young man. Nor could she tell why she was also certain that there was a photograph of Aunt Alice in Savile's flat: in a drawer.

One evening later that summer, as she and Peter were sitting over coffee after a quiet dinner at Brook Street, Trellis came in and said: "Captain Savile on the telephone." Venetia, very thoughtfully, said she was out. Peter looked at her sharply and snapped: "And quite right!" Savile did not telephone again.

DURING that summer a weekly paper of a very defiant tendency published a series of essays signed C.M.S. They were not strictly essays, but sarcastic remarks. It was understood that the rich "backers" of the defiant weekly paper were simply longing for some eminent man to give them the publicity of suing them for libel. The articles over the initials C.M.S. were called *Suggested Epitaphs For Great Men.* Some time after the tennis match at Lacey Moat in the summer of 1918, the weekly *Epitaph* ran as follows:—

Here lies the Right Honourable Peter Antony Serle, P.C., M.P. He lived as though life would last but a minute, and was angry at finding that it lasts but a second. He forged his career with incomparable ardour and audacity, but without grace. Philosophical truth and political falsehood were mingled in him with surprising violence. Scorn, which is not a virtue, was yet his saving grace. Inspired by lofty sentiments, he was in lifelong bondage to the vulgar pageantry of success. His talents were those he despised most in others; yet he used them with an energy and dexterity that far outstripped theirs. With a soul that was

revolted by the pomps of fame, his ambitions unceasingly waited on advancement. Gifted with a mind reflective and idealistic, he passed his life in the turmoil of affairs and attacked idealism in opponents with merciless skill. His religion was that of all truly pious men: he respected the future: yet he was notoriously enslaved by the present. He was a perilous friend, for he saw the truth with a sharp eye: a most dangerous enemy, for he could conceal it with a crafty tongue. He loved to breathe the perfumed flower of classic literature; but his vanity dictated the public statement that he preferred the works of Mr. Edgar Wallace. He was not a wicked man. He was fearless, generous, and of a kind heart. None the less he was an ungallant foe, and wore his opinions with the worst of taste. Requiescat in pace.

Serle showed the sheet to Venetia. She could see that he was enormously flattered. He said: "Confound that cub Savile! Why doesn't he study his subject? It was Phillips Oppenheim."

Then he said: "Venetia, why does that young man hate me so? What do you think?"

"Well," she vaguely said, "you're rather . . . well, alike. . . ."

He roared with laughter at that.

"Venetia, what nonsense! Well, in what way, then?"

She didn't know, she couldn't tell, she wasn't sure, she couldn't think. . . .

"Hawks," she said vaguely. "Anyhow . . . hawkish."

BOOK TWO

TO the present generation, the musical-comedy stage appears to have lost a little of that glamour that enchanted our fathers, our elder brothers, our elder statesmen and our school-days. There was a time when men went mad for love of the ladies of musical-comedy. Madness was the mode, as in Russian novels. There were stories, in those days when gentlemen wore silk hats at noon, of great passions, great jealousies, great bankruptcies, great misalliances. In America they would, they do, make a fuss about it. In England we made a fashion of it. Dukes were quite often involved. One Duke was so terribly involved that ever since he has never ceased marrying other people. Heirs to vast estates enriched the aristocracy of these islands by joining themselves in marriage to beauty, charm and good sense. It is true that the Stage lost a few great ladies. But it is also true that Society gained a few great actresses. Hazel-wands became pillars of the Church. Ornaments of musical-comedy were gathered into the spacious landscape of England. We respect them, we regret them. Nowadays, the musical-stage appears to have fallen on prosaic days. They have technique now, who had beauty then. They can sing now, who could smile then. They can dance now, who could dare then. Such, at least, is the plaint of an elderly friend. His son in due course will doubtless say the same. For is there not one fashion that never changes, to be old-fashioned?

But let us be fair. To regret the past is to be respectful, to be religious. Yet an unprejudiced

acknowledgment of present charms carries with it certain rewards denied to those who look back to the lofty peaks of past enchantments. The present is not always tiresome. The present, too, has its perilous delights, its sweet maladies. Alas!

To take an example, not long ago a young lady disembarked at the port of Liverpool. Her eyes were remarkable. They were blue, they were violet, they were beautiful. They radiated the gentle insolence of a child of nature. They radiated the sophisticated innocence of transatlantic virginity. Her passport said that she came from Kansas City, Kansas. Her mother was a French Canadian. Her hair was fair and fashionable. It flamed by night. The white severity of her cheeks was perfumed with the petals of a pink rose. Her legs were American, slender, eager, destructive, delicious. Her figure was slender although the young lady's peace of mind was already menaced by a certain plumpness about her throat, by a touch of comfort about the curve of her shoulders. However, she was devoured by ambition, which is an assiduous masseuse. She also believed in auto-suggestion.

Young, solitary and beautiful, our young lady travelled to London. Her situation attracted the sympathies of a fellow-traveller, a handsome gentlewoman whose name was Miss Estelle Van Harben. In her youth this lady had been renowned for her beauty, but she had disdained marriage. She was one of a considerable body of women who in our time have disdained marriage. Miss Van Harben lacked the charm of softness, but she lacked it in a striking way. Her grey curls were cut *à la mode,* her nose was the nose of the mother of Coriolanus, and her steely blue eyes instantly penetrated to the weaknesses of her own sex.

Our young lady's weaknesses were, however, sympathetic to Miss Van Harben. The illusion of men had

passed by the young lady of Kansas City. The love of men seemed to her a disagreeable necessity of the dim future. Or was it a necessity? But she was well-bred, and displayed her innocence with tact. Miss Van Harben was therefore encouraged to put aside her contempt for women made only for men, and to interest herself in her lovely young acquaintance. She did. They became inseparable. Their friendship grew into love. Miss Van Harben used all her influence, and it was considerable, to further her *protégée*. Thus the beautiful Miss Ysabel Fuller was introduced to theatrical-managers under the most favourable auspices, whilst in Society she was adequately protected against the less interesting forms of scandal.

Six summers after the tennis-party at Lacey Moat—in 1924—Miss Fuller was delighting the public in a musical-comedy at a theatre in Shaftesbury Avenue. The face of the theatre was bright with the name of Ysabel Fuller in vermilion lights. A drawing of her severe, lovely profile adorned the entrance-hall. In the Bar were her legs and back, by Drian. Undeniably, Miss Fuller had succeeded. Yet she was unhappy, for she was in love. The illusion of men had not waited on her pleasure, but had suddenly pierced her heart like a sword. Alas!

Her dressing-room was at the head of a steep winding flight of iron stairs. Visiting Miss Fuller, one had the feeling of being in a room high on a tower above the purlieus of Shaftesbury Avenue. Whereas dressing-rooms are as a rule dungeons, burrowing into the bowels of the earth for all the world like grimy caskets fearful for their dainty treasures. The one disadvantage of Miss Fuller's room was that it was small. The screen, behind which Ysabel dressed when she had company, and an exhausted but still comfortable divan, almost filled the space between the dressing-table and the door. From the walls signed photographs of patrician ladies testified to the agreeable but inconstant

disposition of Miss Fuller. A prince of the blood smiled at her from her dressing-table. Nevertheless, Ysabel was unhappy. O Fame, where is thy solace! O Death, where is thy sting!

She said to her dresser, Mrs. Myrtle:

"When Miss Van Harben comes, if she does come, tell her I am engaged with the managers on my new contract."

"Hel*lo*!" said Mr. Messenger.

He was lying on the sofa, glancing at the *Tatler*. Mr. Messenger was a man of virtue; he tried to understand everything and to despise nothing, and that was why he was looking at the *Tatler*.

Miss Fuller was dressing behind the screen. There was a rush of water, a flavour of scent and powder, the delicious melancholy induced by a pretty woman's invisible presence. It was the interval after the second act.

"Savile said he might come in," Ysabel explained wearily, "and Estelle doesn't like him."

"And does he like her?"

"I don't think he has noticed her yet. It's just as well. He'll like her even less than he likes the wall-weeds."

"The what?"

"That's what he calls the photographs on the walls."

Mr. Messenger was incapable of ungraciousness. But he was, at all seasons and at all costs, a disciple of truth.

"I thought," he said, "that you weren't going to see Savile again?"

"Freddy, how can I help it? He didn't even notice the fact that I was never going to see him again, so what was the use of never seeing him again?"

"That's reasonable," Mr. Messenger admitted. "But how is it he's going out to-night? You must be influential, Ysabel."

"Only insistent, dear."

Mr. Messenger was incapable of impertinence.

None the less, he was an accommodating sort of man and tried to suit himself to whatsoever company he was in.

"Then, Ysabel, you're still in love?"

"In love? *In* love, Freddy? Oh, I love!"

Mr. Messenger turned over the pages of the *Tatler,* reflecting that the ejaculatory form of conversation was lately being overdone, that monosyllables can make a sentence sound very long, that Ysabel was not what the French call *une femme sérieuse,* and so why worry about her?

"Well," sighed he, "it's your affair, after all!"

"Mine, honey? If it only was!"

"What do you think, Ysabel—that you will get him in the end?"

"Oh, yes!"

"You say that sadly."

"Such hard work, Freddy—and *then* what?"

"But you said you would get him in the end!"

"Oh, I only get what's left of him after I've worked hard on him to get him."

Mr. Messenger stretched his long thin legs. In the old days it was commonly said that Freddy Messenger's were the longest and best-groomed legs in the Brigade of Guards. But that was a long time ago; nowadays the legs retained only their remarkable length.

At first glance Mr. Messenger looked very young, a boy. His face was very small and very smooth. But there were innumerable wrinkles about his grey eyes. His smile was innocent and gentle. He often smiled at himself.

Mr. Messenger was a Roman Catholic, and he came of a long line of men distinguished by their pride and their piety. His eyes were kind and calm. Yet there was suffering in them, as in eyes that have understood what they have seen. Freddy Messenger had seen much. At the age of eight-and-thirty, he had a past. That made him humble, sympathetic and wise. His

humility kept him poor, his sympathy kept him amused, and his wisdom helped him to face the world with resignation. It was only his imagination that made him suffer. Without imagination, Mr. Messenger would have been a happy man. However, he was often preoccupied with dreams of human destiny, and that is a form of happiness for tranquil men. Moreover, being a man of the world, he did not say that he asked very little of the world but he actually did ask very little of the world. Such men are very rare.

That "past" of his had finally left him, forgotten him, in the obscurity of his present calling as a minor journalist on one of Lord Townleigh's newspapers. Old Townleigh said of Mr. Messenger: "I cherish that man." For, like all good men, Mr. Messenger was not afraid of men. Therefore old Townleigh respected him and frequently suffered him to plead for young Raphael whom old Townleigh loved with a jealous love that was not very unlike, so Raphael sometimes thought, just common-or-garden hate.

Thus Mr. Messenger lived at peace with circumstances, and was a solace to his friends. He would often visit Ysabel Fuller, who interested him. On her part, she treated him with respect and affection. Having nothing, he desired nothing. That astonished Ysabel, but she was intelligent enough to respect him for it. For Ysabel was intelligent. She was really unintelligent about only one thing: she never realised how much other people *knew* about her by what she said or did not say. But, then, who isn't unintelligent about that?

Once she said to Freddy Messenger:

"When you come into the room it's as though I put my career away into the soiled-linen basket. But there's always a bit of it sticking out. That's me all over!"

When she was trying to speak the truth, Ysabel, like all very vain people, was apt to be too harsh on

herself. Ysabel was spiritually self-educated. Like Cesare Borgia and Gaby Deslys, she believed in God but was determined to have every desirable thing the earth produces. Ysabel was passionately determined. Mr. Messenger saw how she could be improved, and why she should be improved, for he was a good man. But he was not hopeful of any improvement, for he was a man of the world. As he was also a gentleman, he did not really try.

"Freddy," she called out after a while, "does Savile ever talk to you about me?"

Mr. Messenger seldom answered unworthy questions, maintaining that such generally answer themselves.

Husky and plaintive was Miss Fuller's voice. "Well, I don't know why he shouldn't, as you're his best friend!"

"Perhaps I am, Ysabel. But a good friend needn't necessarily be the sort with whom a man like Savile could discuss such——"

Ysabel treated conversation like a rice-pudding; she left most of it. She cried: "Oh, his self-sufficiency!"

"It's so infernally ungracious, Ysabel, to condemn people's unhappiness with catchwords like 'self-sufficiency' and 'conceit'!"

"Well, isn't he conceited?"

"I don't know, my child. I never know those things. And does it matter? But listen carefully to what does matter——"

"What, Freddy?"

"It is death to be a poet, it is death to love a poet, it is death to mock a poet."

"Say, kid, do I have to die twice to Savile's once!"

"That's what they said in Ireland long ago."

"And Savile a poet! Why, he has made a country-house and a lovely car out of his writings!"

"And much good they have done him! But you will never understand Savile, Ysabel. You're 'in love' with him, you don't like him."

"I *hate* him!" cried Ysabel.

"Don't be silly, Ysabel."

"I'm not being silly! I do hate him—and I'd like to tell him so, but only after—after——"

Mr. Messenger couldn't help but side with Ysabel's hesitation against her possible choice of words for what Mr. George Moore rather sweepingly calls "love's delight." He said quickly:

"You'll be in love with him, Ysabel, for as long as you go on tormenting yourself with the idea of his indifference. It's the very old story, and that's all there is to it."

"Freddy, you're getting brutal and unfeeling in your old age."

"What about your treatment of young Raphael?"

"Oh, that crazy prune!"

"While as for this affair of yours, Ysabel, I'm a good deal sorrier for Savile than I am for you. By being wretched about him you are, so to speak, paying part of your bill——"

"Honey, bill? Who's talking about bills?"

"The bill we all have to pay a part of some time. The bill people like you think that the higher authorities are too well-bred ever to present. But there's no one so matter-of-fact as God, Ysabel. That's why you are suffering now. That's why young Raphael is suffering—this afternoon he was talking about you to me in almost the same way as you're talking about Savile now, only with more sincerity. But Savile's turn has still to come, and I think his will be a pretty steep bill. . . ."

"What maddens me," Ysabel wailed huskily over the screen, "is not knowing whether he's really indifferent or just pretending to be, because he knows that's the quickest way to have me at his feet. Freddy, what do you think?"

Mr. Messenger laughed.

Ysabel's voice over the screen trembled: "Freddy,

why do you always laugh at me when I'm being serious?"

"Were you being serious, Ysabel? I'm sorry."

The husky voice said desperately: "All right, make fun of me all you like. But I'm serious about Savile, Freddy." She said bitterly: "And how I hate that word 'sex'! Any one would think your idea was that all I want of Savile is to sleep with him. . . ."

"Well, it is, isn't it?" sighed Mr. Messenger, reflecting that Ysabel had all the American woman's capacity for hiding a fierce sensuality behind a puritanical rejection of the word "sex."

The screen was swept aside. There was menace in that gesture. There was menace in the air. Ysabel was dressed for the finale. On the arm of the hero, escorted by all the pageantry of a doll's marriage, she would sweep down the broad stairway to the footlights and live happily for a lingering moment in the fleeting attention of a multitude already thinking of the last train home. Regally she wore the harsh bright lights of the little dressing-room. A red lamp glowed in her hair. Her eyes were pools of violet. She was alight with beauty, cold and proud. Standing above Freddy Messenger, where he still lounged on the exhausted sofa, she looked down at him sternly and reproachfully. He was embarrassed by her loveliness. He told her so, but it did him no good. Her reproachful look never wavered. She stood arrayed in the sovereign dignity of loneliness. Tears glittered in the great luminous eyes. Imperious and entreating, she was an outraged evocation out of a world of perfume and lace.

Mr. Messenger said: "Mercy! I beg for mercy!"

Mrs. Myrtle, looking at him with indignation, proffered her mistress a handkerchief, a powder-puff, a glass of water. But could such mortal aids assuage such depths of dolour? Ysabel waved the woman away, out of the room. She sat down on the exhausted divan and took his hand. Her glorious

painted eyes were radiant with truth. Ysabel was extraordinarily receptive, imitative. If she had just read a book, she would talk and think like that book. If she had just read several books, she would talk and think in extracts from those books. As Mr. Messenger had recently lent her several books, he could follow her reasoning quite closely. But he did not make the common mistake of thinking that a person is insincere merely because he or she is talking with somebody else's words. The parrot whose memory, whilst making love to his mate, chances on the words, "Say, baby, I've got a crush on you!" is not necessarily any the less sincere because the phrase is not his own.

"Freddy," said she, "you are the only man I have ever met whom I really respect. Why do you say such things to me? Do you think I'm an animal—the nasty animal I used to be?"

She could speak like that, in that incredible way—and *mean* it!

"That's a leading question," said Mr. Messenger. He was afraid.

"Do you think," said she, "that I think of love as of a shudder that a man can send through my flesh?"

"I do," said Mr. Messenger, desperately trying to remember from what book she could have got that phrase. "What about it?"

Her glorious eyes filled with tears.

"Perhaps you're right," she said. "Oh, Freddy! I want to be good. . . ."

"Ysabel, don't sing to me, I can't bear it!"

"How cruel you are, Freddy! Don't you see how much good you've done me, how much I've changed, developed?"

"When you say 'developed,' Ysabel, don't you really mean that you are tired of one thing and want another?"

"Oh God, the man's so logical he'd make a cat give up washing herself out of sheer hopelessness!

Freddy darling, you do good—and just because you don't realise the good you've done you destroy it again. You're a public danger, Freddy. It's because of good men like you that girls go wrong."

"Don't encourage me, Ysabel. I'm a devil when encouraged."

"But, Freddy, don't you know that the world is full of people who have been cured of some nasty fault or other by contact with some one—and then when that some one fails to see the improvement they get hopeless and fall back on an even nastier fault."

From the foot of the stairway the call-boy cried out: "Miss Fuller, second call, Finale!"

From outside Mrs. Myrtle cried out unhappily: "Miss Fuller, you'll be off!"

Mr. Messenger could hear the headlong dash down the dim, twisting iron stairway. Once, from the foot, he had seen her flying down towards him—like a falling angel, completely! Oh, poor Ysabel. . . .

Suddenly he heard her voice, alight with life: "*Charles!* Darling, you've come! 'Bye, back in a moment. . . . But you're *dressed*!"

Savile's voice, laughing, but as always somehow "protected."

"Old Townleigh's got a party. We'll go, Ysabel. Anyhow, I must, I'm afraid, for I have to see him about something, and I can't get hold of him any other way."

The stairway rattled again, and through the momentarily-opened pass-door was wafted a bar of an informal American waltz. The thought flickered across Mr. Messenger's mind how disappointed Ysabel would be not to be going out to a quiet supper with Savile. Poor Ysabel, Savile was fated always to disappoint her. Then there would be somebody somewhere fated to disappoint Savile, for everything in life has its counterpart.

Savile came in eagerly. He was obviously delighted

to see Mr. Messenger. Savile never could conceal his pleasure. He invariably failed to conceal his displeasure. Such is the art of making enemies.

He looked less tired than usual, less racked, younger. He said he had been searching for Mr. Messenger all day long. That meant, of course, that he had tried to telephone to him just once in the afternoon and had found the number engaged.

At this time Charles Macaulay Savile was thirty-six or seven years of age. He was born of obscure but gentle parents of the intellectual sort that are common to all great cities and are born to beget orphans. Savile's early youth had been hard and lonely. He had had to fight for everything. Then everything had come too easily.

INCE we last saw Savile playing tennis at Lacey Moat six years before he had proved to be a grave disappointment to his publishers and to his public. He had delighted them. He had bewildered them. He had mocked them, distressed them, disgusted them. In short, he had written a series of "smart" novels, and then he had written sound novels.

At the age of thirty-one, when he was at the height of his success, Savile had suddenly left London and buried himself in the country. The only reason he gave for this step was to be found in the course of a sketchily flippant letter to his friend Freddy Messenger. He said that for one thing he had had "enough of publicity" and that for another he was tired of making "a fool of himself" and wanted to be what he was born to be—"a serious man, one of the world's workers." Actually, one of the world's workers or not, he wrote nothing. Neither essay, story nor novel came from him for more than two years. Had the "name" he had already made not been so fantastically popular—for Savile had once been what Mr. Bernard

Shaw and Sir James Barrie have always been on the grand scale, a genius at publicity—he would have been forgotten. As it was, when a novel by him at last did appear, that name of his immediately carried it, in the enchanted mathematics of publishers, to those intemperate heights that echo with the cry of *40th thousand*. But it stayed, in the lists of advertisements, at *40th thousand* for a few weeks, and then disappeared forever from public life. After that, at intervals of six months, appeared four more novels. They were not about lords and champagne and lovely painted ladies. On the contrary, library-subscribers found them "disappointing" and "very disappointing." They asked themselves: "Why can't any of these young writers nowadays write about *happy* things?" His American publisher said of Savile: "If ever an English writer sold himself in a sensational way to the American public, it was young Savile. And then, when he had them eating out of his hand he slaps them in the face and tells them to go hang themselves!" His English publisher gave it as his opinion that Savile was scarcely a gentleman. Savile had made more money out of him than almost any other young writer of the century—and when he had enough to give him a comfortable income for life what did he do but turn about and write novels without any *appeal* whatsoever?

Savile was an extreme example of an intellectual tendency of our time into which it may be interesting to make a brief inquiry.

When a man who is notably successful in his profession makes the indiscreet remark that he wishes he was not so successful, stupid people immediately say of him that he is "affected" and "insincere." Nor are stupid people entirely wrong in making that judgment. Stupid people have an uncanny way of hitting the right nail on the head—with the wrong hammer.

The "affectation" or "insincerity" that prompts a man to make such statements is frequently to be found

not in any conscious unusualness in himself but in the self-consciousness of his generation. A whole generation can be "insincere" or "affected." Whole generations have often been very "insincere" and "affected" indeed. What an all-conquering little jackanapes Napoleon's generation made of him! And what are we not making of Mussolini now? "*There's* a great man!" But in the end the generation must get the better of the individual each time. For no single man can outdo a multitude of men at insincerity, hypocrisy, malice and self-interest.

The peculiar danger of a generation's insincerity or affectation lies in its invisibility—until it has passed. One cannot see it at all until one can see its back. And then of course, one can, one does, make fun of it. And one notes, with a degree of satisfaction, that it was often the most sincere men and women of each generation who were the most rabidly infected by the particular affectation of their time.

In our time we have seen, as they say, some mental "goings-on." There are no end of unpleasant affectations and offensive peculiarities abroad. Many worthy people consider, for instance, that the most offensive peculiarity of our time has been in the vulgarisation of success. Others point to "sex-literature." But the vulgarisation of success and "sex-literature" have been commonplaces of the ages. Whereas it has been left to our time to achieve what was once thought impossible, the vulgarisation of failure.

That is the tendency of which Savile was, unconsciously but inevitably, a part: inevitably, for it has been well said that no man is greater than the time he lives in: unconsciously, for no man who has not a sheep's mind can admit even the possibility that so proud and personal a purpose as a will to failure is but part of an intellectual tendency that, in reaction from the facile and extravagant fruits of modern success, is trying to idealise failure. Thus we have had of late

years a whole drama and literature of failure. We have also enjoyed the amusing spectacle of astonishingly successful newspapers extolling this literary traffic in failure—insisting, for instance, on the beauty and the worth of Tchekhov's stories and plays, on the "truth" of such plays as *Outward Bound* and *The Vortex,* on the "beauty" and the "realism" of the plays of Mr. Eugene O'Neill and of Miss Susan Glaspell. Whilst in literature we have the spectacle of a generation of brilliant young people who have absolutely nothing to offer but sarcastic comments on success and happiness. It is true that the young writer does not insist on being a failure himself. But he takes a very strong stand indeed on writing sympathetically about anybody but a failure.

Savile, even at the height of his success, had known —with what he told himself was a "sense of relief," whereas there was a strange fear and helplessness in that "relief"—that his "success" couldn't "last," that he would somehow find his own level, the level where thoughtful writers wrote in decent obscurity. He had known that the day would come when the mob would dismiss him to the outer darkness as yet another of those fundamentally "tiresome" men who cannot bring themselves to flatter the vanity of their fellows by retaining the position they have given him.

ALMOST on Savile's heels Mrs. Myrtle bustled into the dressing-room with a basket of flaming orchids. Like all orchids, they looked awful and beautiful. Savile, like all men, was tempted to look at them with formal contempt, but he suddenly realised as much and began laughing to himself. Mrs. Myrtle muttered: "Ten pounds'-worth of nonsense! Lord Archery is in Miss Martin's room. He wants to come up here to see you, Mr. Savile."

"Archery?" Savile turned to Mr. Messenger.

"Young Raphael Archery."

"But the old Jew's name is Sass!"

"Lord Archery, you fool, is the heir's courtesy title."

"All right, I don't care. Archery, indeed! Where the devil do they find these fancy names? And why does he pitch on me?"

"Don't flatter yourself," smiled Mr. Messenger. But he looked worried, saying: "Orchids announce him, gardenias are the heralds of his coming, and it may soon be raining diamonds."

"Ysabel?'

"The boy's mad about her."

"Good!" said Savile.

Mrs. Myrtle spoke rarely. She prided herself on never speaking "out of her turn." But she was loyal, and she trod the narrow path of loyalty with an intolerant step.

"Miss Fuller," she said, turning a golden stocking inside out, "'as never encouraged him. I've never seen the like of his lordship. What I say is, No is No."

"Yes, that's what you say, Mrs. Myrtle," smiled Freddy Messenger. "But you are an exceptional woman."

"Maybe," said Mrs. Myrtle. "And 'is lordship is an exceptional young gentleman—with a bottle."

Savile, restless, said: "I saw Esther to-day. This afternoon."

"I know," said Mr. Messenger. "I got there just after you."

Savile looked at him bitterly. "It's all your fault, Freddy!"

"She didn't catch pneumonia from me, I assure you."

"You know what I mean. There was I perfectly happy in the country——"

"Your servants told me you were going cracked with depression."

"Absolute nonsense! And you drag me back to London——"

"For your good, Charles. It's time you went about a bit again."

Savile jeered: "Went about a bit! First thing I come across is poor Esther down and out for having 'gone about a bit' and then . . . being here! I'm going back, Freddy."

His friend smiled. "You'll never go back, Charles. You will run away differently next time."

Savile said helplessly: "What I simply can't understand is how an intelligent old scoundrel like Jerry Townleigh can be such a perfect silly ass about his children!"

"He loves them," Mr. Messenger said, "with a jealous love."

"She's dying, Freddy!"

"And that's why you're going to the party, to tell the old scoundrel?"

"You still think he doesn't know?"

"Every one's afraid to tell him."

"You're not, Freddy! Why haven't you told him already?"

Mr. Messenger said: "Because a man standing on the bank of a swift river has very little reason for hoping that by shouting to a log being carried down by the current he will be able to persuade it to alter its course. Nothing can make old Townleigh alter his course. He will never see Esther again. And in a sort of way—his way, any jealous father's way—he's right."

"*Et tu, Brute!* to you, Freddy!"

"Charles, yours is the sort of tolerance that would make intolerance in others punishable by law."

Savile, laughing at himself, persisted: "But you can't maintain the old scoundrel's in the right!"

"A father who loves his children very deeply," said Mr. Messenger, "loves them for being children. When he sees those children growing to boyhood and girlhood

he thinks he loves them doubly for what they will become, the great man and the sweet lady that his children will be. But that's really an artificial love, that's the *public* love that a father has for his children —whereas the sincere, the private, the irresistible love is for the child in his children, the child who as far as he is concerned will never grow up. But the child does grow up. That's the old, old tragedy of childhood, that childhood doesn't last for ever. The child becomes Esther the woman. And Esther the woman isn't old Townleigh's child. He's a wise old man, and he knows the limits of human understanding and the limits of human love. I'll bet you anything, Charles, that he forgave Esther her sins years ago. But he can't forgive her for not being the child he loved and treasured. He can't forgive her for not letting him love her in the way he *wants* to love her. And if you tell him about Esther now his mind will be closed against you, because he still loves the child, his child, and no one can take that away from him—but as for the pitiable woman she has become he knows that he is no *use* to her and that she is no *use* to him. And Esther knows it too. And they love each other. These Jews, Charles, are so infinitely more versed in family love than Gentiles that, whereas Gentiles can be driven by family antagonisms into hatred of each other, Jews can only be driven into hating each other with love. You remember the way the old man and Esther looked at each other that last time. . . ."

The two friends had been there, at the grand house in Berkeley Square, that distant afternoon during the war. Both good friends of old Townleigh's, for the old man delighted in youth, and intimate friends of Esther's, for Esther was the artistic one, both in the confidence of the father and the daughter, the "old scoundrel" had asked them to come to see him one afternoon at the height of the domestic crisis as though for a casual talk, whereas both the young men knew that the old

man was really beseeching them to persuade Esther to meet him half-way. So low had the old autocrat fallen—he would meet his child half-way. But the Russian Ghetto had come to Mayfair that afternoon, with its tyrannies and stoicisms and shouts and martyrdoms of family life. The old man had risen to the stature of his outraged love like a figure in melodrama. Esther had smiled, with that look of *certainty* about something with which some passionate women defy the common laws of life, as though they are inexorably driven to that defiance by a conviction of the necessity of their unhappiness. And Esther had stood there smiling with the baby in her arms, swearing that she hadn't the faintest idea who the father was. All old Townleigh had wanted, beneath his outraged love and shattered ambitions, was for her to deny her harlotry by admitting that she had had only one lover, the father of her child. Then he would see to it that the fellow married her. But she wouldn't admit what they all suspected, that it was the man Williamson. She said her child's father might be one of several, that it was impossible to tell. Old Townleigh and Esther had never met since that day eight years before. And they say that the world is a small place!

"Anyhow," said Savile, "I think one ought to tell the old scoundrel."

"Well, he'll take it better from you than from anyone else."

"Why?"

"Because you are both sentimentalists."

"That reviewers' word! Poor Freddy, you've come down to that, have you? What does 'sentimentalist' *mean*?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"Lead, kindly light!"

"Well, Charles, you're a sentimentalist because you put a false value on your desires and a false value on the people who you think will satisfy those desires."

Mrs. Myrtle said with resignation: "Lord Archery will be waiting."

"Of course, have him up!" said Mr. Messenger.

"What will we talk to the boy about?" Savile growled.

"That's all right, he'll talk about himself."

Mrs. Myrtle, before leaving the room, brought out another bottle of whisky with that air of impersonal resignation that, it is understood, numbs beery husbands into silence. Mrs. Myrtle lived at Brighton, whither she took the last train every night. Throughout the evening at the theatre she was silent and preoccupied, wondering whether she would catch her train. She always caught it, but it was a worry to everybody.

Lord Archery came in and, as there was no room anywhere for him to sit down, leant against the door. He swayed a little, he smiled a little, he struck a match or two and, finding he was trying to light an empty cigarette-holder, he laughed a little. A portrait of him leaning against the door could most aptly be called "Fashions for Men." None the less, young Raphael had nothing of the irritating air of the exquisite. Hearty men on seeing him did not feel an itch to hit him. A gentle youth, he wore his gentleness with sincerity and good taste.. True, he radiated an air of infinite elegance. But, like Beau Brummell, he was so well-dressed that he was unnoticeable. At least, he would have been unnoticeable but for his beard. A German bullet had scarred his chin, that was why he had grown a beard. Yet his beard too was gentle, a soft golden thing, most clean-looking, unbeardlike. Maybe it was the golden beard that made young Raphael look so foreign. He did not look Jewish, but foreign, immensely foreign, Russian, anything. People said of him: "Young Raphael gives one a very Hispano-Suizan feeling." Young Raphael was twenty-seven years old, but he often complained of feeling

younger. His smile was shy and gay. His glance was as soft as a kiss. His expression was that of a man who is a prey to the meekest sentiments. He was debonair and pitiable.

Now this fortunate heir to many millions had one striking disability. To Raphael speech came with the utmost difficulty. But when he did grasp a word, it was with incredible difficulty that he could be persuaded to let it go. One word would sometimes last him for six months. These favoured words were, as a rule, words of negation: "revolting," "monstrous," "poisonous," "lousy," "septic," "hurtful," "hot-making," "bilgeworthy." To Raphael's mind "bilgeworthy" explained itself and nearly everything else with beautiful precision. Its construction was, of course, derived from "blameworthy," but with a certain license. "Bilgeworthy"=worthy of bilge=worthy to be bilged=lousy=no good for serious discussion. Thus, most things were "bilgeworthy." But Raphael reserved the right to make certain concessions: and the opposite of "bilgeworthy" was "bedworthy." He was a grave disappointment to his father.

Mr. Messenger wanted Savile to like young Raphael. It was Mr. Messenger's contention that one should be sorry for Raphael, because he was so young and so rich. He said:

"Well, Raphael! Where did you spring from?"

Raphael stammered: "Been seeing the show. I'm always seeing this show. One up on the Prince so far." His gentle eyes fluttered towards Savile. They rested on Savile with enormous respect. Blushing crimson, he said: "My dad's got a party at the Savoy. Primrose Room. Go in by the Embankment-entrance and come out by the window, if you're lucky. You know my dad's parties. Sure to be bilgeworthy. Why don't you come?" Whereupon young Raphael was covered with confusion.

Savile had only met the Kosher Kid once before,

and that was six years earlier. Like everybody else, of course, he had heard of his mad escapades. This second meeting made him roar with laughter. Freddy Messenger was laughing too. And Raphael, always willing to please and to be pleased, joined in the laughter.

"Certainly I'm coming!" Savile laughed. "It will be the first party I've been to for years. Thank you for asking me, but your dad has asked me already. I'm taking Miss Fuller. I wonder if he'll mind?"

"Mind?" said young Raphael with astonishment, and suddenly began laughing helplessly. Then he blushed crimson, and said sharply to Mrs. Myrtle: "May I have a drink, please?" He said to Savile: "Feel very unlike myself this evening. Every one's congratulating me. Dad's probably asked Miss Fuller already. He's heard I like her and wants to cut me out."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Messenger sharply.

Raphael ran his fingers nervously through that beard of his and stammered, but with no trace of ill-feeling: "It's true, God damn you to hell."

Mrs. Myrtle, thinking of her train, muttered in Mr. Messenger's direction: "Don't know 'ow Miss Fuller will 'ave room to dress, that I don't!"

Raphael's gentle eyes fluttered about Savile's amused face. He tugged at that beard of his with a helpless expression, and said: "Miss Fuller doesn't like me at all. She's marvellous. *Most* antiseptic!" He gulped down the whisky which Mrs. Myrtle put brusquely into his hand, and added with a painful effort, seriously, hopelessly: "I'm no good with women. I'm just a tiger in a taxi, but once out in the open I might be little Lord Fauntleroy for all the notice they take of me."

"Oh, shut up, Raphael!" sighed Mr. Messenger.

"If a chap," said Raphael with dignity, "can't

have the courage of his inferiority complex, what can he have?"

Freddy Messenger, with sudden determination, stood up. He felt responsible for young Raphael, old Townleigh's only remaining son. The "old scoundrel" and he often discussed Raphael. Poor Raphael.

"Come along, young man," said Mr. Messenger.

"Why?" grinned young Raphael.

"Because for one thing you haven't been invited to this dressing-room and for another you look as though a little night air wouldn't do you any harm. No, you can't have another drink. Come along. I'll walk towards the Savoy with you."

"A man like me," said Raphael, swaying, "wouldn't be seen dead with a man like you. I am a lightning-snob. A house I was staying at the other night was struck by lightning. The side of the house gave a cracked sound like a septic stage-effect. Since then I have gone about asking people if they have ever been in a house while it was being struck by lightning. If they haven't, I am afraid I can't know them. From now on I am a lightning-snob."

His gentle eyes never ceased fluttering about Savile. Freddy Messenger could see that the boy wanted, for a reason not difficult to guess, to provoke Savile, to get on his nerves; and with the occasional but uncanny clairvoyance of a drunkard he had seen exactly how to get on Savile's nerves, by never taking his eyes off him and talking idiot-talk. It was extraordinary how Savile let himself be tormented by people. He was like a ship for ever tossed on the treacherous seas of his own sensibilities. Raphael and Savile were both men in bondage to a profound shyness, a profound lack of self-confidence. But Raphael wore his lack of self-confidence like a flower, whereas Savile, his features enamelled into impassivity, bore his within him like a disease. Now, curled up again on the cushions of the exhausted divan, he had picked up the *Evening*

Standard and was glancing at it with an impassive face.

"I want," Raphael stammered, "to ask Ysabel why she thinks me so bilgeworthy. Perhaps it's because I'm a Jew. These Americans are very fastidious. Mr. Savile, do you think Ysabel dislikes me because I'm a Jew or because she just doesn't like me in what's called That Way? If anybody knows, you should. I look upon you with deep respect. Wherever two or more are gathered together I always lift up my voice and cry: 'Thank God for Savile the novelist. He is the only young writer left in England who worships women.'"

Savile just glanced up at him from the paper, then down again.

Mr. Messenger put on his bowler-hat, took up his inevitable umbrella, and said: "Raphael, you will be getting a thick ear at almost any moment now."

Savile, ignoring young Raphael, looked up from the paper and muttered:

"Damn this party!" He indicated Raphael, who was swiftly helping himself to another drink. "Does he know about Esther?"

Mr. Messenger whispered: "She won't have him near her. Says he's her father's pet. No good telling him about her now. He's already sad enough and drunk enough." He turned briskly to Raphael, who was again lolling self-consciously against the door. "Come along, young man! Ysabel will want room to dress when she comes up."

Round his shoulder Raphael looked at Savile, who had apparently quite forgotten his existence, and suddenly scowled. But he said nothing. At that moment, with a panting laugh, Ysabel burst in.

"Oh, oh, oh!" she laughed, squeezed past the two men in the doorway and threw herself on the divan beside Savile. "You'll have to mind your lovely black coat, Charles, else I'll make you white all over!"

She lay at full length, her head deep in a crimson cushion, smiling at Savile.

"Good-night, Ysabel," said Mr. Messenger. "Come along, young Raphael."

"Never felt less like coming along in my life," said Raphael. He was staring moodily at Savile and Ysabel.

"Good-night, Freddy dear!" It could not have been in Kansas City that Miss Fuller had acquired the social art of ignoring people as she now ignored young Raphael. But she ignored him with a smile. Alight with gaiety, she was whispering to Savile beside her.

However, Raphael appeared to bear no resentment. But he did not move from the doorway, taking no notice whatsoever of Mr. Messenger's pull at his arm. His gentle eyes fluttering moodily about Savile and Ysabel, he stammered: "My God, she's marvellous! A decided improvement on Venus, say what you like. Antiseptic as an angel."

A look of exasperation passed over Ysabel's face. But she did not glance in the youth's direction. Then she laughed vaguely, sighing: "Really, *really*!" Savile's face was quite expressionless. Mrs. Myrtle, thinking of her train, said: "What dress will you wear to-night, miss?"

"Charles, what shall I wear?"

Freddy Messenger smiled helplessly at Savile. The smile said: "Don't encourage her against the silly young ass. Let's get him out of this quietly."

Savile said with a smile: "Young Archery appears to be one of the main supports of this show, Ysabel. You ought to be very grateful to him."

A look of exasperation passed over Ysabel's face. She said vaguely: "Why, of course! But I always am. . . ."

Then Mr. Messenger said sharply: "Raphael!"

Raphael had suddenly wrenched his arm free. He

stood above Ysabel and Savile on the divan. He swayed.

"Raphael, what's the *matter*?" snapped Ysabel.

An expression of extraordinary dignity came over Raphael's face.

"You mustn't talk to me like that," he said.

"Well, what's the matter with you? What's all this about?"

"I love you," said Raphael.

"You're just blind-drunk, as usual."

"Nevertheless," said Raphael, "I love you."

And his eyes were ambitious of humiliation and his pale lips rejoiced in suffering.

Ysabel glanced sharply aside at Savile, as though to see how he was taking the "scene," but he was turning over the evening-paper, obviously waiting for Raphael to go. Raphael blushed painfully as she looked towards Savile. His lips trembled. Ysabel, looking up at him icily, said: "You'd better go, young man."

"I am going," stammered young Raphael. "Of course I'm going. In fact, Freddy and I are just about to leave the building in a body. But——"

Freddy Messenger giggled almost hysterically: "Oh, for God's sake, *come* on!"

Savile whispered to Ysabel: "He's so drunk he doesn't know what he's doing, so go easy."

Ysabel looked at Raphael with very cold eyes, but she said gently: "Do go away now, Raphael, and go to bed and call me up in the morning."

"My bed's a desert," stammered young Raphael, and began weeping. "I am anti-bed. Since I met you, Ysabel, I've become an honorary-member of every night-club in London. I dream of you. I'd love to be hurt by you because the pain would come from you——"

Ysabel, suddenly tormented by Savile's twisted smile, stormed at Freddy Messenger: "Why don't you take the beastly man away?"

"Don't be silly, Ysabel!" said Raphael pathetically.

And he wept. "How can he take me away without a fight if I don't want to go? The only way to get me to go quietly is to appeal to my gentlemanly instincts. After all, I was, I am, I shall always be a public-school man."

"Oh God!" sighed Ysabel. And she whispered huskily to Savile: "He's just *crazy*, that's all! Blind drunk every night, hanging round here. . . ."

"You have poisoned my young life," stammered Raphael, weeping. "Your image gnaws at my vitals. And unless you yield to my carnal desires I shall dwindle away into a shadow. Now I can't say fairer than that, can I?"

Savile began laughing helplessly.

Mrs. Myrtle, thinking of her train, said: "The silver one, miss, or the new Molyneaux?"

"The new one," said Ysabel briskly, and was about to jump up from the divan when Raphael, standing over her, stammered frantically: "No . . . wait, please! Look!"

A great unset diamond lay in the glistening palm of his hand.

"Oh my!" gasped Mrs. Myrtle.

Raphael, with the blazing thing in his hand, was standing there, trembling, trembling. With his mouth open.

Mr. Messenger said quietly: "Raphael, put that away at once. It's not yours."

The boy said savagely: "Of course it's mine. Who the hell do you think you are? I've bought it for Ysabel. I'm going to give it to her if she will let me make love to her just for one night."

Ysabel said: "You filthy little cad!"

"Yes, yes, of course!" Raphael gabbled frantically. And, throwing himself at Ysabel's feet, he sobbed: "Oh God, Ysabel, if you only knew how I love you! If only I could kiss your feet!"

He thrust the great diamond onto Ysabel's lap.

She said huskily in Savile's ear: "Something foul always happens to me when I'm with you. . . ."

She said to Raphael: "Never let me see you again, you beastly little Jewboy." And, sweeping the jewel from her lap as though it was an insect, she jumped up from the divan. The diamond, glittering and laughing, was rolling under the little table on which stood the basket of orchids, when Mr. Messenger quickly stooped and picked it up. "Don't touch it, you fool!" yelled Raphael, and gave him a violent blow on the mouth.

Ysabel said afterwards that the queerest thing about the whole wretched business was how they suddenly seemed to forget Raphael's very existence. It was as though they had been waiting for Raphael to "go the whole hog"—and when he had, he just vanished from the scene, he became an insignificant spectator. Freddy Messenger's mouth was bleeding. He dabbed it with a handkerchief. Thoughtfully. Ysabel, as she stared at the tall thin man thoughtfully dabbing his lips, vividly remembered the stories she had heard of Freddy Messenger in his youth, of the "impossible" young soldier of the days before the war. There hadn't, apparently, been a brawl or a scandal but that Freddy Messenger had been somewhere in the thick of it, his long arrogant legs wide apart, a thoughtful stare in his round blue eyes, a cheeky retort on his lips. One of the most notable amateur boxers of his day, he had been dangerously and cruelly quarrelsome. His honour about money had been in question time and again. The end had come in 1910. One evening, at ——'s Club, Freddy Messenger was accused of cheating at cards. The funny part of it was that there were quite a number of people "for" Messenger in the affair. They did not take the accusation of cheating seriously. The accuser was an Italian, and those were the days when Mussolini was a Socialist and only elderly American women took Italians at all seriously. Freddy Messenger could have cleared himself. As it turned out,

he vanished for a time, then suddenly resigned his commission and membership of all his clubs in a formal typewritten letter to the effect that he thought it only right to do so as he had recently been guilty of cheating at cards. And that had been the end of the notorious Freddy.

Dabbing his lips with his handkerchief, he said impatiently: "Now come along, Raphael! And here, take this thing, and you had better put it back first thing in the morning before it's missed, or the old man will make a riot. Or shall I take care of it?" He held the diamond out to Raphael, who only stared at it stupidly. Mr. Messenger put it back in his pocket. Raphael stammered: "God, imagine me to-morrow morning!" and rushed out of the room. They heard him tearing down the stairway. Freddy Messenger followed him. Ysabel vanished behind the screen. There was a rush of water, a fragrance of scent and powder, the flash of a white arm, a busy ankle or two. Nothing was further from immodesty than Ysabel's dressing-room habits. Until a dressing-robe enfolded her, she was invisible. She used to laugh: "I am a light only in darkness!"

"It certainly was a hell of a diamond!" sighed Ysabel between rushes of water. "It must have cost a fortune! Where on earth could he have got it from?"

Savile said with an effort:

"From his father's collection. I'm afraid young Raphael didn't know what he was doing when he stole it. Hurry up, Ysabel."

"*Stole* it, baby?"

"For you, Ysabel!"

"The crazy boy! To steal it. . . ."

"There's love, if you like!"

She chanted: "Charles, Charles, *Charles*! Why is it we love those who don't love us, and are loved by those we don't love?"

"It's nearly midnight, miss," said Mrs. Myrtle, thinking of her train.

SAVILE drove his car himself. It was an open car, there was no nonsense about it. As he followed Ysabel out of the stage-door he said: "Perhaps you had better take a taxi, Ysabel. Something might happen to your hair in my car."

"Is that a promise, can I rely on that?"

"I meant, your hair might get untidy in an open car."

"Charles, how you kill a girl's illusions! But of course I will come with you."

Although it was so late that all the other players had long since left the theatre, several of Ysabel's faithful gallery-girls had waited for a glimpse of her. Their plain nice faces lit up on seeing her. They waited for her every night. They loved everything about her and took an enormous interest in the men who were "mad" about her. Ysabel always exchanged a word or two with them, calling each by her Christian name, and they went away happy. They lived, as it were, in her beauty, in her success. They adored her, and wove a glamour about her, and talked themselves into adoring enslavement. To them she was the princess in the legend. They were good respectable girls, mostly servants or waitresses or shop-girls, and to them Ysabel was the fulfilment of their dreams and hopes and ideals. And she could talk to them, be of them, without affectation or condescension.

"Oo, what a lovely cloak, Miss Fuller!"

"The wages of sin, Edith!" Ysabel laughed, and they giggled happily at the joke.

"Is it ermine?"

"White rabbit, silly!"

"Oo, Miss Fuller, what a state Lord Archery was in to-night!"

"And Mr. Messenger taking him away like a schoolboy!"

"I must go now. Good-night, Edith—good-night, Doris, Muriel, bless you."

"Good-night, Miss Fuller! See you to-morrow night."

Savile turned into the Charing Cross Road, making for Trafalgar Square. Ysabel, crouched beside him, said not a word. How beautiful she was! And yet her beauty did not move him at all. It was somehow the beauty of his past, the beauty of his life in London years before, the beauty he had grown out of. How cruel it was, the way every one grew out of things, but two people never grew out of the same thing at the same time. Savile had grown out of the life of the town, it meant nothing to him any more. And Ysabel was the town, the Town, and she was the bright light of the life thereof. That was why that young madman loved her, she was the enchantress of ordinary enchantments, she was the enchantress of electric-light and bath-salts, she was of her time, she was the lovely symbol of the unrest and glamour and gaiety and commonness of her time. Her beauty suggested all formal vices and only the tolerable virtues. Wrapped in perfume and paint and the magic attraction of success, she would for ever enchant young men, women and statesmen. She was carved of the soft unyielding flesh that governs men and defies destiny. Knowing nothing, she knew all that she needed to know, for she knew what she wanted. Also, she believed in auto-suggestion.

As they approached Trafalgar Square she murmured: "Don't let's go to the party, Oh don't let's go to the party!"

Savile darted a glance at her. She was looking straight in front of her with a strange soft solemnity. He knew that look.

"Smile, damn you, smile!" he said.

But she would not smile, looking straight in front of her with a strange soft solemnity. It was a look that meant many hidden inevitable things. She was looking into the future. Savile wished she wouldn't, this seriousness of hers irritated him, it attached too much importance to him in relation to her and he had not the slightest intention of being important in any relation whatsoever to her or anybody else.

He had met her casually a few weeks before at the offices of a theatrical-manager with whom—Freddy had arranged it all as an excuse for dragging him up from the country—he was to discuss the dramatisation of one of his novels. He had thought Ysabel fun, had taken her out to luncheon several times and once to supper at the Embassy. And then, suddenly, a week ago, she had sprung this serious attitude on him.

"Charles, don't let's go to this party!"

"Then where *shall* we go?"

"Home," she said. Tonelessly.

"What, you're tired, you want to go home?"

"Your home."

"Ysabel, I'm a serious man, one of the world's workers. I haven't time to indulge the flesh."

"I hate you when you say things like that."

The waste! She wasting her time with him, he with her! What for, why? Still, there they were. . . .

They were in Trafalgar Square, the swirling vortex. People stared at Ysabel, at the flaming hair and the beautiful face. In the bright lights her face was as white as the moon and her lips as red as butcher's meat. Her eyes were deep and dark and sad.

She said: "I have never really wanted a man before."

Savile, manœuvring through the traffic at the lower end of Trafalgar Square, could find nothing at all to say to that. He recollected that she had once told him that the thing she enjoyed most in the world was hav-

ing her back scratched. He supposed one could have that done to one in a friendly way without committing oneself to anything more decisive. The harsh treatment of their men by American women was proverbial.

She said: "I have been bad and cruel. And now I'm sorry."

"Let's ring Raphael up at once and tell him."

"You *can't* understand!" she said. "I mean in my soul."

He could scarcely believe his ears. Did people talk like that? He had just to glance aside at her to see if she was serious. Oh, she was!

They were in Northumberland Avenue.

She said: "Charles, let's not go to the party. Take me to your flat. You've never allowed me there before. And I want to talk to you. I can't talk to you in these beastly crowded places. There's so much to say. . . ."

"I won't scratch your back, Ysabel. I'm too proud."

"Charles, don't be beastly to me!"

"But I *must* go to the party, Ysabel, just to see old Townleigh about something. But if you like we'll first take a run as far as Chelsea. . . ."

"Chelsea!" said Ysabel miserably.

He turned the car. Ysabel lit a cigarette, very cleverly with one match. Then he found it being thrust between his lips. It was faintly greasy with lip-rouge.

"That's as near as I've ever got to kissing you," she said. Tonelessly. Ysabel had recently read a book in which the heroine spoke Tonelessly. She was a good woman at bottom, but went wrong as a girl owing to thwarted love and ended badly in a motor-accident of unexampled ferocity. The book was very popular. Ysabel had worked it out that when a woman speaks Tonelessly it means that she desires with her soul and therefore knows not shame, she is above shame.

Savile made the common mistake of thinking that Ysabel was insincere because she used insincere methods to get what she wanted. He wished to Heaven she would not *try* so hard to show him how sincere she was. And if only, he thought with suddenly comic desperation, she would get it out of her head that he was "wicked!" He was positive that she thought he was "wicked." Probably because the women in his books now and then committed adultery not out of Pique but because they liked it. That was the trouble with Ysabel, she was at that primitive stage of civilisation, the jade-chrysoprase-Beardsley-*fin-de-siècle* stage of civilisation that glories in "slim evil dreams," in "beautiful limbs," and "attractive wickedness" generally. Ysabel was that most deplorable of all Europeans, an American who thinks Oscar Wilde the "greatest writer in the world."

Suddenly, huskily, rapidly, she began telling him of herself. Ysabel had one of those husky voices that some women admire in other women. She poured out herself at his profile. She poured out her soul. That is to say, she told him that she did not want him "just physically." Ysabel was one of a vast number of men and women who consider that when one is pouring out one's soul the first point to emphasise is that one does not want any one "just physically."

Savile listened unsympathetically. He made up his mind never to see her again. He had never so much as even begun to make love to her—and here she was assuming all sorts of things. And Savile, moreover, didn't believe a word she said about her desire, physical or otherwise, for him. Not a word. She was acting to herself, being "civilised." Certainly he would see to it that they did not meet again. She was a bore.

Savile was quite unable to believe that any woman on whom he hadn't lavished all the tenderness of his heart could ever be, as they say, "attracted" by him. That is one of the innumerable forms of "unconceit"

in men and women that can hurt more than the blind cruelties of pride and vanity.

He let the car run on. How would he tell old Townleigh about Esther? Ysabel went on pouring out her soul. She told him about herself. Savile reflected that Ysabel's soul was not very different from many other souls. It consisted chiefly of things she had done which she had not really *wanted* to do. Bother her soul.

He swore at himself. His old fault. His besetting fault. His inability to keep his mind impersonal. He could look detached, but mentally he could never be detached, he was always "for" or "against." All the errors of his life had come from that. All his ungraciousness. That infernal ungraciousness. Never to be able to decline anything with grace. Always, mentally, to be pulling something towards him or shoving it away. Shoving. He hated shoving. And he kept on finding himself shoving. Like Ysabel beside him. A pair of shovers. He couldn't help seeing in Ysabel and himself deep likenesses of misconduct. One should love only the best. There is no second-best. One should love only the best, the finest. Or keep oneself to oneself. He had not. He had shoved. Ysabel was not, now. She was shoving. He wasn't anywhere near the "best" for her. But probably she wanted him merely because he didn't want her. He had wanted people like that, too. Shoving. But, by God, he had kept his soul out of his misbehaviour. Therefore he had been far unhappier than Ysabel was now. That dratted soul of hers! But it had its uses for her, it was a boon and a blessing to her. Ysabel's soul was a modern American invention guaranteed to bring comfort into the home and delight within the reach of all. Ysabel's soul made her feel that her desires were deep, that her lusts were ethereal, that "there was something in life besides sex." Ysabel's soul was Just A Nice Girl. Ysabel's soul was the housemaid who shall inherit the earth.

He said suddenly: "The only thing I've got against you, Ysabel, is that if you had any affection for me at all you wouldn't put me in the position of having to tell you every five minutes that I don't love you."

"Yes, but you won't understand, Charles! You seem to think I'm just sort of attracted——"

"Attracted"—how one had come to detest that word!

Six years ago it would have been different. He would have made love to her weeks ago, maybe they would have lain together and maybe not, but the chances were that they would, and by now they would either have been great friends or nothing . . . or maybe he would have been wretched about her, maybe she would have tormented him with sudden indifferences.

Yes, Ysabel would always get the better of one in the end. That soul of hers had a spine of steel. It would always snap back upright in the end. The damned all-conquering housemaid!

"If only you would understand," sighed Ysabel, "that what I've got for you is an immense affection. The sort of embracing affection I've longed to have for somebody all my life. That's why, I'm telling you, I get so revolted when people want one just . . ."

If only she wouldn't talk! That was the one thing he had against Americans, they talked too much. And too slowly. They just went orn and orn and orn. It was as though, impressed by the speed of their trains and elevators, the wonderful efficiency of their telegraph and telephone systems, they felt they had more than plenty of time for talking. Savile had once been in an elevator that had shot past thirty floors before an American friend had got out: "My reaction to Florence . . ."

Trying hard to keep the irritation out of his voice, he said: "We'll go to the party now, Ysabel. But we'll only stay a few minutes and then I'll see you home."

Why on earth had he said that! Good Lord, he had made a tryst! What bed-fellows boredom begets. The whole problem of modern life in a nutshell.

She said nothing. She sighed happily. He recollected that in one of the worst of his novels, the one that had made him famous, he had written: "She sighed happily." It was really too much to have it brought back to one like this. . . .

"Don't sigh again!" he said sharply.

"Charles, kiss me," she whispered. Tonelessly.

Obviously, it lay between slapping her and kissing her. Kissing would be quicker. And, anyhow, she couldn't talk while being kissed. On the other hand, she would be sure to put that boring soul of hers into her kisses. Very likely she had the sort of soul that would fit exactly into a kiss. He had written that sort of stuff, too, for the magazines. "Kissing her, he felt her soul entering into his, possessing him. . . ." It was really extraordinary how life imitated the cheaper fiction.

He stopped the car in the leafy quietness of Cheyne Walk. "And kissing her, he felt her soul entering into him, possessing him." And it did, too. On the tip of her tongue. There was no question about it, her soul was on the tip of her tongue, quick and warm and penetrating. It fluttered, as a soul should. She looked exhausted as he let her fall back into her seat. Her eyes stayed closed. Her eyelids faintly glistened with cream. Her cloak had fallen open, and her breasts seemed to be bursting through her thin dress. Looking at her smudged mouth, he wiped his own, leaving a red stain on his handkerchief. Suddenly she opened her eyes wide, stared at him blindly, put both her hands to her breasts, sighed, and began to make up her face and lips.

As the car approached the Savoy again, she whispered close to his ear: "Promise we won't stay

long. And then we'll go to your flat. I want to stay with you all night."

Savile yielded to the desperate thought that if breakfast was as much as half-an-hour late in the morning he would find himself, so great was her determination, not only married to Ysabel but with a grown-up son by her.

And suddenly, seen from that aspect, as a woman of quite magical possibilities in determination, Ysabel became a positively amusing figure. Instantly, suspiciously, she asked him why he was laughing. He told her, and as she laughed out loud he found himself thinking that she had never before been natural with him. For the simple reason that he had never given her the chance to be. He, the more educated, the aspirant to the divine favours of grace and nobility of mind, should have accommodated himself to her, should have tried to help her instead of sitting quietly by and letting her make a fool of herself. He certainly ought not to have been so harsh on her soul. He had lived, these last six years, a life chaste enough to satisfy even Saint Anthony. Nevertheless, his thoughts had hardened, his judgments had become cruel. Obviously, it took a better man than himself to disdain the flesh without adding to the sins of the mind. He glanced at Ysabel beside him, warm and white and close. He remembered her kiss with pleasure. With great pleasure. It had been, as they say, "a nice change for him." She had plucked him out of years of solitude, had dragged him back into the warm river of life. He had been a serious man, one of the world's workers, for too long. There is a time for everything.

He did not draw the car up at the doors but parked it in the line beneath the trees. There was a small knot of policemen and chauffeurs nearby.

"Charles, what is it, you're so silent? What are you thinking about?"

He remembered her kiss with pleasure. He liked that soul of hers on the fluttering tip of her tongue.

That was a very good place for a soul. He tried to kiss her again, but she prevented him, saying that she would have to make up all over again. They walked into the hotel, up a short stairway of light and voices. As Ysabel went to leave her cloak she turned to him. Men passing by called her name, for she was famous and beautiful, but she looked only at Savile. He was amazed at finding himself feeling flattered. She was serious, formal, unapproachable. But with him she was close and warm. She whispered:

"Wait for me here while I leave my cloak. For to-night I'm not going to let you out of my sight. If you leave me for one moment at this party I'll never speak to you again, I swear I won't. And we'll go immediately after supper, shall we?"

She turned away from him with that concentrated look of absent-mindedness which some women assume when they are called to the telephone at meal-times. Savile could imagine Ysabel being frequently called to the telephone at meal-times. She would come back to the table looking thoughtful, smoking a Virginian cigarette and saying huskily: "I don't think I want any sweet. I'll just have coffee."

She came out of the cloak-room. Most beautiful she was. The charioteer of . . . bath-salts. With a soul like a millionaire's bathroom, fitted with every modern convenience. Or like a great money-making film, full of sex-appeal.

"I don't like you when you look like that," she said.

VENETIA'S bedroom was high above Brook Street, and from her windows she could see the trees in the square nearby. A large yellow moon was climbing the chimneys of Kensington. Light proudly stalked about London, and shadows clung in terror to the walls. The lamps in the streets were like pale

sunflowers. The darker sky towards the east was ablaze with a storm of stars.

It was one of those nights when London is a city dressed with the imagination. Youth, formality and a certain self-assurance marked its indolent charm. Attired in silver and shadow, it lolled in the white night and thought sarcastically of Paris.

The trees in the square nearby were discussing the events of the season with little sighs and excited whispers. At first they had looked very haughty and dark, for they had combined with one another to "cut" the moon, which had for some time been declining socially and had to-night definitely committed himself to the outer darkness of Kensington, "where the Squares," said the trees with disgust, "are called *Gardens,* and perfectly *straight* streets are called *Crescents* and what-not!" However, the moon came to his senses at last, no doubt attracted by the music of a great ball that was being given by Mrs. Omroy Pont in Grosvenor Square, and the trees forgave him with petty curtseys, rising like "fountains from the pools of their shadows."

"Peter is late, old Jerry will wonder where we are," Venetia thought. And her mind was a blank. Her mind was like a lake without a ripple. The lake was dark, Oh it was dark, but anyhow it was smooth, without a ripple, and that is something. But now and then a boat would dare the stillness of the lake, making frantic ripples, a thought dark and swift. Quickly, she would drive it back, capsize it, sink it. Perish, foul thought!

It was almost midnight, but a great clamour came up from London, as though every one was up and about and doing. The town was given over to youth and fashion, to perfume and lace, and young men came out of Claridge's with their silk-hats in their hands, saying "good-night" to their sisters and going off to enjoy themselves. Taxi-drivers on the ranks slumbered

at their seats, and constables at crowded corners gave way to the melancholy reflections induced in solitary men by the vortex of Babylon and the swirling dust of Sodom and Gomorrah. Woe and woe and woe. Motor-cars silently flashed up and down and stood in long rows round the square nearby. Some prowled about, sleek but menacing, growling a little around corners, like beasts in search of water. They would have to search long and far for that to-night, Venetia thought.

Music of the dance floated up through the still air and set her feet idly prattling to themselves. Those small, helpless-looking but obstinate feet had continued to live their own lives quite apart from Venetia. They rejoiced in disorder. Venetia spent a large part of her life in stumbling downstairs and over things and just catching herself up and pretending she hadn't stumbled.

She saw the flash of Peter's car rounding the Davies Street corner. Peter had a Vauxhall car, a short sharp thing that stood out indignantly from the scrupulous traffic, like a full-stop in a page by Henry James, or better still like a wolf among cows. Venetia stood quite still. Away went the lake and there was a wilderness, and thought rose within her like a stark barren tree. "Oh, what have I done, and why have I done it, and what is there to do now? Are there no endings in life, must things just go on for ever, getting unrealer and unrealer?" The car drew up at the door and Peter made signals with his horn, for he was lazy and arrogant and despised small social sciences like the ringing of bells. Venetia prayed: "Our Father Which art in Heaven, please make me strong, or if that is impossible, and I suppose it is impossible, please make him understand, or if that is impossible, and I suppose it is impossible, please make him pretend to understand."

Trellis said from without the door: "Mr. Serle is waiting in his car, miss."

"Ask him to come in, Trellis. I am not quite ready."

The glass showed her how pale she was. She used a little rouge. It seemed to her that her lips were quite invisible. She used a little rouge. "How *awful* I look!" she thought. As an afterthought she took off her pearls and her ring and the diamond bracelets from her wrist. As an afterthought she put on her pearls again. She was right, for her eyes put out her jewels, whereas pearls are always pearls.

She walked slowly downstairs. She thought: "We are going to a party. Let us be gay." But her soul was sad within her. She thought: "I am growing old, old, and what have I done, where am I, who am I? An aimless useless person. I was born to be a woman. And what am I? A second-rate lady. Hipless, bustless, useless."

Peter called: "Come along, Venetia!" His voice was quick and gay and young. Oh, that insurgent, urging youth! That's how he *got* one, always. With that unproud youth of middle-age. Men ought to be proud. Men ought to be proud, so that women can know where they *are*.

He was in the hall, standing beneath the portrait of Jasper Vardon by Orpen. Trellis was hovering. She smiled "Good-night, Trellis," and the best friend she had in the world vanished.

Peter looked happy, excited, fresh. She did not know whether to be glad or sorry about that, but reflected that no matter how a man looked at the beginning of a conversation one word would instantly darken his pretty face. She approached him slowly. And her soul was sad within her, and all the words in the world suggested nothing but futility to her soul.

"Venetia, are you ill! You look so white!"

"No, dear, I'm quite well."

"But why so white?"

"Darling, perhaps I haven't made up so well as usual, that's all."

He took her hand. Her hands were slender and curved and she never wore but a white diamond on the second finger of her left hand. But to-night she was not wearing even that. Peter had given her that ring on her twenty-first birthday. He noticed that she was not wearing it. She thought: "He only notices what I'm wearing when he is uncertain of what I am thinking."

"Venetia, so beautiful to-night!"

On just those evenings when one *knew* one looked awful, they said one looked beautiful. . . .

"Did you have a nice dinner, Peter?"

"Dull. Muriel had her friends. One dear old lady, the mother of a friend of Muriel's who was killed in the war, who made a *gaffe* by saying that she had seen you at some private view and how beautiful you were."

"Was Marjorie there?"

"She looked as sour as a quince, darling."

"Isn't it funny how she goes on hating me, even with a nice husband and two lovely children to think about. . . ."

"That young lady! Don't let's talk about her. You look rather sad, Venetia."

"A little depressed, it's nothing."

"And your hands are like ice!"

"A little chilly, it's nothing."

"You're chilly, with eyes like that! They're like lamps to-night!"

She thought: "There you are. . . . Eye-talk!"

"Do you remember, Venetia, how you used to blink all the time?"

A sort of despairing clutch at intimacy that made people remind one of the "dear little tricks" of one's childhood. . . .

She thought harshly: "People have no right to memories of one's childhood. It only makes them silly.

And as one grows up one has no right to the memories of one's own childhood. It only makes one silly."

On coming downstairs she had wrapped herself in a wide cloak. She had wrapped all of herself in that cloak, every bit of herself, thinking to herself: "This cloak shall be my shield and my defence. I have wrapped my soul in it. But it is a pity my eyes have to be left out. No good has ever come to me from those eyes. People have got into the habit of walking about in them just as though they belonged to them. But to-night we shall see. . . ."

Serle fingered her cloak, saying: "I didn't know you had a white ermine. Real?"

She knew that he would not have noticed her new cloak if something in her looks had not made him feel unsure of her. Poor Peter. She smiled, and said: "According to father, Peter, I was twenty-five years old this morning at a quarter-past-eight. He gave me this cloak for a present. Before we go, dear, I want to say something."

"What is it, Venetia? Has anything happened? Is that why you look so—fateful?"

"Fateful!"

"That's how you looked suddenly."

"What a cruel word, Peter! Full of sighs. . . ."

"What is it, Venetia, what's the matter?"

She had to smile at his darkening face. But she instantly regretted her smile. She knew only too well what effect it had on people, particularly on Peter. It made him prey on her. He preyed on her. They preyed on one, and called it "love." She drew a step away from him.

"Angel," he said darkly, "not that again! Haven't we been through all that?"

From among the journals and papers on the table she picked up a cheap weekly sheet. There was a paragraph marked with a pencilled cross. She gave the paper to him.

He snapped: "Where do you *get* the filthy things?"

She said: "I don't, they just come. Father stopped here on his way to Lacey Moat this evening to leave this one. Father has a manly man's weakness for a dirty story."

"Don't, Venetia!"

"Read it, dear."

The paragraph read:

"A divorce has been arranged, but has not yet been announced, between a very well-known leader of the Opposition and his distinguished-looking wife. The intervener will be a beautiful heiress who has hitherto astonished the world by remaining unmarried. Now we know why. The well-known politician will need all the money that's coming to him to console him for the ruin of a career on which he has spent so much time and trouble."

He threw the paper down with no more than ordinary contempt.

"Why," he said calmly, "let things like that worry you?"

"I live in such a glass house, Peter!"

"Well, so does everyone else."

"Oh, no, other people's are made of Triplex!"

Her poor cheap little joke, cast up out of her desperation, seemed to exasperate him almost beyond endurance. He said sharply: "Venetia, don't look so . . . despairing!"

She cried: "But I hate your wife being hurt like this! That quiet, nice, *unhurtful* woman . . . and this *mess*!"

Serle brushed all that away. "If you knew Muriel, you'd know she wouldn't deign to notice filth like that. Besides, she knows——"

She said: "Knows what?"

He said unsteadily: "Sometimes I think you hate me, Venetia."

She said: "If I did, how easy life would be!"

And she said again: "Knows what, Peter?"

His lean grasping fingers went deep into the soft ermine as he suddenly caught her by the elbows and pressed them tightly to her side. He did that to evade the compulsion of her eyes, to preserve the illusion of his dominance, his superior good sense. And he shook her a little, as though from another world back to this, before he said:

"That we are just friends, Venetia."

She stared up at him, but what she was thinking of he did not know, and he was afraid.

"Well, isn't it true?" he said, trying to smile.

"True?"

She was staring at him, but it seemed to him that it was not at him that she was staring, and it seemed to him that her soul rose to her eyes like a flower through still water. He trembled a little, and whispered:

"Venetia, how I love you!"

"Yes," she said. "I suppose I have been very cruel to you."

He laughed nervously. "Cruel? Good God, no!" Then he said: "Only sometimes, when you look at me as you are looking now and I can't tell what you are thinking of."

She said: "My dear, it's because you know so well what I am thinking of that you are afraid to admit your knowledge to yourself."

And now it seemed to him that he could see her soul like the shadow of a bird's wings in the clear deeps of her eyes.

He said sharply: "Venetia, what would my life be without you!"

The shadow of the wings passed over the deeps, was gone. He drew a breath of relief. She looked at him for a second as though they had not spoken of anything at all. He began to say something nervously, but his words stumbled in the dark forest of her understanding, and instead he said helplessly:

"After all these years . . . and I don't know you at all!"

She turned abruptly away, saying:

"Very well. Let's go."

LORD TOWNLEIGH'S parties were what is called "mixed." The people who were to be seen at them were either so assured of their social position that they could be seen anywhere or those who, having no social position at all, did not mind where they were seen.

It will be remembered that when we left Savile he was taking Ysabel Fuller to this party. Nor can it have been forgotten that Miss Fuller was beautiful, that she was determined, that she put her faith in God and auto-suggestion, and that Savile had promised to take her home. But she had rejected him. Her last words to him, as he left her sitting with old Townleigh at the supper-table, had expressed contempt.

There was a little delay in finding his hat in the cloak-room. There were several men there, talking. He did not listen to them, but they got in the way. Mount Wyroc, head of the Catholic house to which our friend Mr. Messenger belonged, was saying to Serle, with the calm slow truculence of a Tory schoolmaster to a landowner who is trying to deprive the school of its playing-fields:

"You blasted politicians can't really forgive yourselves for having fought with France against Germany. France is the natural enemy of every single Protestant Englishman. You would love to see her bankrupt if you weren't afraid of the consequences. There isn't a single Government Department that hasn't been working and plotting against France since 1916. Oh, I know! Time after time I've seen faked documents, statistics, stories. You began your preparations to down France in the last two years of the war. There

was more scum in 'high places' during those last two years than there's been in the whole history of England. England and America and France—it's like a lot of mean-faced peasants with spades round a deerhound. Well, you'll have her down in the end. There's no room for France in this century. She's almost down now. And crowds of English and American cads scrambling round her to have a good look. Holy Mother, imagine a world without France! Imagine a mother without milk!"

Reginald, eleventh Earl of Mount Wyroc, was not generally considered to be a satisfactory representative of the peerage. He was very poor, very independent, very truthful and very fat. That combination makes up what is usually known as a "gross" man. Mount Wyroc was generally considered to be a "gross" man. He treated the truth as though it was the Albert Hall, as something ordinary, commonplace, inevitable, which it was easier to walk through than round. Ladies could not bear him, but he had some curiously complete friendships with gentlewomen. Resigned to an age of muddy minds, he was preoccupied with gardening. The Mount Wyrocs have always been Papists and gardeners. He was considered to be the best bridge-player in London, but he consistently held poor cards.

Tarlyon, yawning, said: "Why go to the trouble of imagining when you can look into that ballroom? There isn't a woman there who wouldn't be ill at the idea of giving her children suck."

Noël Friday flushed. Noël Friday was one of those slim young Guardsmen with kicked-in looking stomachs and a sombre admiration for middle-aged women. It was his conviction that he was a man among men and a gentleman with women. But he ceaselessly wished for confirmation of that conviction. He said: "Look here, Tarlyon, you've got no right to say that. For one thing, Mrs. Nightingale is in there, and she's a woman who——"

"Oh, shut up!" said Mount Wyroc absent-mindedly. "And it is a gross exaggeration to call Thelma Nightingale a woman. She is a telephone-number."

Noël Friday was so furious that he blew his nose with his breast-pocket handkerchief. He said: "By God, Mount Wyroc, if we were living in any other century——"

Mount Wyroc said gloomily: "If we were living in any other century, young man, you would probably be my servant and I would be denied the doubtful pleasure of being rude to you. Please go away."

At the foot of the short, broad stairway that leads to the Embankment-entrance of the Savoy stood a figure in white. She was looking down, thoughtfully, waiting. She was so still, waiting for something. She filled a space in Savile's consciousness that had always been a blank. That was how he thought of her. And she lit that space with her quietness, her deep unconsciousness of herself. She walked into that space as Mr. Guedalla tells us that Marie Antoinette once walked into the tired and tawdry Court of France, a tall girl with gleaming hair. Only Venetia's hair was curly, and it gleamed with its own gold.

As he went down the few stairs he began the business of taking out and lighting a cigarette that he did not want. She had not as yet noticed him, she was looking down. She was waiting—for Serle, who was still arguing with Mount Wyroc. Maybe she would not notice him as he passed. He hoped not. He quite definitely did not want to talk to her. He had nothing to say. They had danced together, in almost complete silence. It had been for him an immensely satisfying silence. There had been nothing ulterior in it, nothing at all insinuating. She had made it that. And her long-limbed slender body in his arms was somehow part of that silence, it was somehow the lovely shape of that silence.

Maybe she had understood why he was silent, maybe she was only tired. Their eyes, as they danced, had

met once. She had looked at him, for far less than a second, with a direct deep seriousness, as though she was joining herself to some thought which hadn't yet but would in due course come to him.

Now he was passing her on his way out, but she said:

"Mr. Savile!"

He felt himself staring at her like a fool. But why was she so serious? While everyone else in the world seemed to be grinning pretty nearly all the time. . . .

He said: "You were so plunged in thought, I fancied you wouldn't see me." It pleased him enormously that her face was still, that her expression didn't waver and froth about, like most people's.

"I was thinking of you," she said.

He felt himself go white.

She looked out, through the open doors, to the trees that hid the river. Her lips were parted. He was heavily depressed at the thought that he could not know one single one of her thoughts, that there was no contact between her life and his. That was why he was depressed. That was why he felt so hopeless, so alone. He was only good enough for the Ysabel Fullers of life . . . the waverers, the frothy ones, the shovers . . . and they were not good enough for him. But he messed about with them. He had been messing about with one of them that evening. That was all he was good for.

"It would be lovely," she almost inaudibly said, "to drive out into the country to-night."

He said: "That's what I'm going to do."

"And to stand on a hill!" she said, and suddenly turned to him with a smile, her first smile. She said quickly: "I once read in a book, I fancy by Maurice Baring, that men with blue eyes are cruel but that men with brown eyes are kind. Is that true, Mr. Savile?"

He smiled. "You mean, am I kind?"

"Of *course* you are!" It was as though she had impatiently dismissed her own question as a very silly one. She went on: "That's why I wanted to say something to you, Mr. Savile, but it didn't seem worth while to disturb our silence while we danced. I've often wanted, during these last three years or so——"

"But we haven't met for six years!"

"Fancy, six years! It's been almost a triumphal march for you, hasn't it!"

"My publishers don't think so," he smiled.

"They ought to be *proud*! The later books . . ."

"You'll do me a favour if you write and tell them so."

"I would cheerfully, Mr. Savile. I owe you an apology."

"An apology?"

Suddenly, she was abstracted. He couldn't find a word to say. They stood there, silent. He felt heavy, helpless. A moment ago their eyes had been bright with the union of moods. Now she stared, still, thoughtful, through the wide-open doorway. People passed by, talking. She had withdrawn herself from him. He cursed himself for putting himself into the power of people's moods. He went on gaily with people, thinking they were *with* him—and suddenly they weren't, he was "left." He always did his damnedest to prevent them from suffering from his own moods, he always tried to hide his moods—but they never did, they didn't care.

He was astonished, could scarcely believe his ears, when she said, slowly, thoughtfully, yet as though from a great distance: "I've wanted often to apologise to you for thinking evil of you that afternoon at Lacey Moat. . . ."

And she tried, as he stared wonderingly at her profile, to explain the feeling she had had that far-away afternoon on the lawn at Lacey Moat, that the man at her side wasn't talking at all, that some one labelled

"Savile, the writer" was talking, but that there was someone else there too, some one very different . . . that some one whom she had suddenly recognised while reading one of his later books.

"I disliked you," she said. "I disliked you very much that afternoon. I think I gloried in disliking you. Then, as I was reading a book of yours about three years ago . . . I suddenly got quite hot remembering how *proud* I'd been of having disliked you."

"Proud?" he said. He did not understand. He didn't want to, particularly. All he wanted was that she should go on talking.

"Well, comfortable," she amended. "Fat, comfortable." She looked at him, seemed to take him by the arm. "Haven't you ever noticed how comfortable people feel when, on meeting some one, they just dislike them? Comfortable, I suppose, because one feels that here, anyhow, is some one who isn't going to have the chance ever of disturbing one's life in any way——"

"Do people disturb you? You let them?"

"Do I let them? They don't ask me, I've found. They just do it."

"Hearts haven't good manners, have they?"

"Oh dear! But I suppose you're different. I suppose you don't let anything or anybody disturb you. How lucky!"

He smiled. "I don't think there's one person I have met in my life who hasn't in some way or other disturbed me."

"Isn't it awful! And do you think, Mr. Savile, that they are at all disturbed by us? I do hope so, sometimes. I want some of my own back."

He said: "I must have been disturbed by you that afternoon when I played tennis at Lacey Moat. I wanted so much to see you again, and later on I rang you up, but you were out. . . ."

She began laughing, and he thought: "Good Lord,

how unhappy she is! And the funny part of it is that I know why she is unhappy, I understand her unhappiness."

She said: "I remember so well! Trellis coming in and saying, 'Mr. Savile on the telephone' and I thinking a bit and then saying 'Out.'"

"I wonder what you thought about during that 'bit.'"

"Oh, I suppose . . . well, one has to fit things in —or not." She smiled, and added: "But my memoirs aren't very exciting."

Serle's voice, just behind him, said coldly:

"Ready, Venetia?"

The question was put with that sarcastic, querulous coldness with which men of affairs try to impress upon women the value of their time.

Savile did not turn to Serle behind him. It seemed to him immensely important to watch Venetia at that moment. His eyes were suddenly extraordinarily clear, he would miss nothing. He saw her glance quickly over his shoulder towards Serle. What was in that sudden look—love, affection, duty—boredom? With enormous chagrin he found he could make nothing whatsoever of it.

She was that rarest of women, one who does not "give away" her men to strangers by so much as a look . . . one who protects her friends against the belittling criticism of strangers.

She was holding out her hand to him. He took it, staring at her. Suddenly it seemed to him absolutely unbelievable that she was leaving him. With Serle. Good God, why Serle? He wanted to ask her many questions, he wanted to understand. He heard himself saying: "Good-night."

And she said:

"Good-night."

And she added swiftly, smiling: "And I mean it."

"Mean what?" Serle asked impatiently. Savile almost started with surprise. He had, in the fraction of a second, forgotten that Serle was there. He looked round at him. Yes, Serle was there all right. Serle, apparently, was always there. That was what people said.

She was saying: "Why, Peter, only that I really wish Mr. Savile a good night. He looks tired."

They were going out. Savile stood there, staring. It seemed to him impossible, that combination, that union. *That* man! And old enough to be her father. They came together, they went together. Always together. What did it mean? That shop-soiled man and the tall girl with the curly gleaming hair. . . .

They were going away. Damn Serle! He called out at her back:

"Shall I see you again?"

Serle, turning, said: "What?"

She turned her head. The white face set against the night. The light in the darkness. The long-awaited light in the old,.old darkness.

"Why, of course!" she said.

OUTSIDE, as he made to walk to where his car stood wedged in the line of cars, a hoarse leisurely voice said:

"I've been waiting for you."

The stud in Mount Wyroc's shirt-front had slipped out, and his shirt gaped open.

"Last I saw of you, Reggie, you were preventing able-bodied men from getting their coats and hats."

"With that poisoned fungus, Serle. I say, Charles, what are you up to? After living a decent life—presumably—these last few years, why the hell do you spend your evenings with a feather-brained little lecher like that Fuller girl?"

Savile, wishing him to the deuce, said absently: "Oh, I don't know. It doesn't matter."

Mount Wyroc lifted his silk-hat and passed a handkerchief across his vast, bulging, glistening forehead. He had eyes like oysters, grey and wet and cold.

He said hoarsely: "I suppose there must always be some one in one's life from whom one must stand everything. But the rest don't matter. It's a pity, Charles, that you weren't born with the instincts of a gentleman. They would have helped you to distinguish between the people who matter and the people who don't."

"Oh, go to the devil!" said Savile.

"Love!" Mount Wyroc breathed heavily. A constable dooked at him.

"Lo-ahv!" spewed Mount Wyroc.

"Lahv!" roared Mount Wyroc. "By God, I stand for chastity!"

"So do I," said Savile.

"You!" said Mount Wyroc. "You're just a blasted sensualist like almost every other unmarried man of your age and you think yourself damned unhappy because you can't find one good mistress but have to put up with a lot of——"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Savile.

"What I want to know is, why the dickens don't all you men get married when you're twenty and then stick to it and get on with your work?"

They were standing by Savile's car. Serle's Vauxhall, with an indignant roar, flashed past them. Serle called out: "Good-night, Reggie!"

"There's your man," said Savile. "Go for him. Good dog!"

Mount Wyroc raised his enormous face to heaven and roared out: "Where is Jehovah to smite the priests of Baal, to crush the maggots in high places, to sweep away the scum from the seats of the mighty?"

The policemen nearby were roaring with laughter.

Savile said: "So that's what you think of Serle, is it?"

"On general principles, yes. Personally, I quite like him. He'd have made a fine Jesuit. He's got one of those useful political minds that are trained to be afraid of thinking unfamiliar thoughts. They say he's still as crazy as ever about the girl. God, what a crew!"

Her atmosphere, as she passed by in Serle's car, clung to his mind like a rare fragrance. When she had gone by it was as though an exquisite scent had been extracted from the night.

Savile said: "Do you believe that beastly gossip, about her being his mistress?"

Mount Wyroc said: "I don't listen to gossip."

Savile snapped angrily: "Do you or don't you believe it?"

Mount Wyroc chuckled. "In the course of a fairly long life," he said, "I have come to one conclusion—never to believe that two people who aren't married are sleeping together unless I actually see them at it. And as I never do see them . . ."

Mount Wyroc said: "As to that girl, there's nothing blank about her expression, as there always is about these man-mad young women. I had a long talk with her once, and she said that one of the minor tragedies of life is that we contract debts when we're very young that it takes us a lifetime to pay off." He added: "You'll notice she said 'minor tragedies.' She's all right. Doesn't attach any importance to herself."

Savile, suddenly disgusted with everything, murmured: "Maybe she's right."

What the devil, he bitterly asked himself, was he up to again? Why must he let his mind be suddenly charged with interest in some one—interest, idealism, enchantment! What common, silly, dirty meanings those grand words could contain—idealism, enchantment, glamour, romance! Why couldn't he just pass her by, keep himself distinct from her, not let her prey on his imagination? As though any good work

could come from a mind such as his, a mind that was an ever-ready prey to the most fatuous idealisms. That was mainly why, nearly six years before, he had turned his back on the life he had been leading, had since then lived in almost complete detachment from the life of London—that life in which he had been unable to prevent every pretty face from preying on his mind, taking up his time, corrupting his sense of values . . . the life of helpless contacts, of too-easily avoided lonelinesses, of quickly-assumed idealisms and quickly-dropped intimacies. Savile looked back on his life with immense distaste. Time over again, he could recall, he had been wretched, had been in despair, about some woman or other—whom, as he would suddenly realise one day, he didn't even really like, had no real feeling for at all. The vulgarity of it all, the vulgarity of forever cheating loneliness! And now here he was at it again, the same Savile after six years of well-ordered detachment . . . fatuously idealising, filling the deep places of his mind with desire and hope and anger. It made one seriously inclined to take to drink, the realisation that one could never get the better of the worst side of oneself. He had taken to drink once before. . . .

In a raging temper with himself, Savile took the wheel of his car. Here he was again—first messing about with Ysabel Fuller and then letting his mind run riot among other people's lives, idealising one person, hating another. Serle and the Vardon girl! For years he had avoided that life. And here he was, at the first contact with her, assuming a mentally intimate attitude towards her, siding with her against Serle, against her life or her fate or whatever one called it. Serle and the Vardon girl. For years they had been bracketed together. People had come to think of the connection as inevitable, they had grown used to it. The adventurer and the beautiful girl. Well, if she liked to make a mess of her life, let her.

He snapped: "Which way are you going, Reggie?"

"I'm living at the Cavalry Club. Edith's in. . . ."

"You had better take a taxi. I'm going into the country to get some air."

Mount Wyroc sighed hoarsely. "I'll come with you. I can sleep anywhere."

And, even as the car raced past Northumberland Avenue, Mount Wyroc was audibly asleep.

However, Savile made a mistake. It was a night, he reflected, of mistakes. As he passed Hurlingham, eager for the rush of cool air about his face, he raised the wind-screen. Whereupon the spirit of fun that invariably moves even the smallest winds in all their dealings with fat men at once lifted up Mount Wyroc's silk-hat from off his head and deposited it in a place unknown. Savile did not stop to find out. What is one silk-hat in this world of strife and suffering?

The car sped quietly on towards Guildford. The night was warm and fragrant. It was a night for walking and silence. Friendship would flow easily on such a night, and love pass into tranquillity. Savile breathed in the immemorial perfume of growing things.

His lights shoved the night before them. They shoved and shoved. The night retreated all the time, round corners, into fields, down long roads. But that was only its joke. You can't beat the night. Instantly it closed behind the car, black as the inside of a mountain. The night is a terrible thing. You can't see what it's doing. You can't get the better of it. It makes children of us. Very silly children. . . .

Mount Wyroc awoke with a start, felt his uncovered head, and said hoarsely:

"You ought to get married, Charles. You need something to do."

"God, don't I write like the deuce!"

"Writing is not a whole-time career for a grown man."

"Oh, go to sleep!" sighed Savile, and Mount Wyroc slept.

They were on the road to Southampton, that winding, climbing, beautiful road that leaps over the Hog's Back and down to the soft plains towards the sea. How often, and always by night, Savile had raced along that very road to Southampton, alone, sometimes confused to the very roots of his mind by what they called "success," which is gold that begets gold that begets gold, which is sin and wickedness and bathrooms and Chinese silk next to the skin and the gaiety that is without joy and fornication that is without passion, sometimes desperate with anger at the forces that impelled him to soil the quiet thoughtful things in him by rushing headlong down the noisy road of fortune . . . to Southampton, the young author of the new age who makes a million dollars by flicking the lies of all time into a second of meretricious life, to Southampton and its quay, to the liner at the quay, to a stateroom in the liner, one of those horrible smooth liners full of horrible smooth men and slack-mouthed women, the floating scum of civilisation that is for ever moving to and fro in search of the same thing . . . to New York!

Savile, these years later, could vividly recall with what a compelling sense of adventure he had first seen the towers and palaces of New York rising from the sea into the morning mist, the stone and steel monuments of the new Egypt "riding out of the sea," superbly tracing their arrogance against the everlasting sky, proudly measuring their lofty aspirations against those floating and ever-vanishing wisps of cloud that, more enduring in their passage than iron and stone and men, have seen the morning and shall see the twilight of the world . . . the towers and buildings of New York that greet the stranger with the unutterable splendour of a city of free men! And then, New York. . . .

"I shouldn't wonder," said Mount Wyroc suddenly, "if you married that Fuller girl in the end. She's about your mark."

"I'd rather kill myself."

"You probably will, after you've married her."

"And anyhow," said Savile thankfully, "she wouldn't have me. Her last words to me as I left her with old Townleigh were, 'You poor white trash!'"

Mount Wyroc said: "Put not your faith in the contempt of women! It is as variable as the moon."

SAVILE, long absent from parties and what are called places of "amusement," had known scarcely anybody at old Townleigh's party but his host and a Mr. Eyeloft. The latter gentleman had helped Ysabel and himself, on their entrance, to find two empty chairs at the far end of the long, still crowded supper-table. Mr. Eyeloft, although he had been regarded for the past thirty years as one of the most attractive young men in London, and might therefore have been thought to be just a trifle unaware of what was passing immediately outside the orbit of his own intimacies, was, on the contrary, always delighted to congratulate, as it were to bless, if only by the most delicate inflection of a smile, every younger man on the companionship of a beautiful woman. In the same way do some men of vast wealth make believe to a poor friend, mayhap an author, who has recently acquired a hundred pounds or so, that he is the possessor of an enviable fortune.

How different was Lord Townleigh's benevolent but boisterous method of charming young people. After midnight old Townleigh couldn't resist making believe, to any young man or young woman who happened to be important enough or striking enough to be engaging his attention, that it was high time for *that* young man or *that* young woman to give up "attracting"

all the other women or men in the room: to give, that is to say, some other less "attractive" people a chance.

They had not been long at the supper-table when old Townleigh, as gay and noisy as a pleasure-steamer at Margate, withal as magnificent as the Bull of Babylon, approached them. He smelt of champagne, and when he blew his nose he smelt of sandalwood too.

Ysabel whispered fiercely: "Don't leave me alone with him, don't leave me alone with him, don't leave me alone with him!"

"Oh, *he* can take care of himself all right!" Savile said ruefully.

Whereupon Ysabel, in that surprisingly and completely natural way of taking a joke against herself that had already delighted Savile once that evening, greeted old Townleigh with a burst of laughter.

"I haf," said Lord Townleigh, for when he was on the top of his form he would revert to the language of his forefathers, and how nice that was! "I haf," he boomed, "some suspicions of this young man Charlie Safile. Have some champagne, Charlie."

"Charlie?" giggled Ysabel, vividly unable to envisage her so definite friend by that familiar name. And her hand under the table suddenly sought his and clasped it tightly. "Charlie!" she whispered.

"Well, my mother always used to call me Charlie!" Savile protested in a surprisingly hurt voice, as though, now that some one had mentioned it, he really couldn't see why "Charlie" should sit him so amiss. For we are so constructed that, whilst we are not displeased at that *something* about us that does not easily encourage our acquaintance to call us by a nickname or by an affectionate diminutive, we are quite hurt by the suggestion that such a nickname or affectionate diminutive does not suit us at all. We instantly want to know why it should not suit us, and our minds are clouded by a suspicion that we are hard and unsympathetic-looking.

Ysabel whispered: "Oh, I love you more than ever when you are simple and look hurt! Why aren't you always like that!"

Old Townleigh, following his invariable method of ascribing to every young man of any eminence whatsoever an infinite capacity for successful love-making, boomed: "It is very well, my friend Safile, to bring your fenerable mother into the conversation——"

"Oh, she's been dead twenty years!"

"Nevertheless," boomed old Townleigh, "she is fenerable! I was about to warn you, Ysabel, against this young chentleman. He is a seducer of young ladies. Time and again he has seduced where I haf only produced—presents! Time and again he has stood between me and the final fulmination of romance. In the last few years I thought I was rid of him, I thought he had turned respectable—but now he has come back, and with you on his arm, whom I lof! Have some champagne, Ysabel."

"Darling, I lof you too!" Ysabel sighed huskily.

"Dat is just as well," boomed Lord Townleigh, "when one gonsiders the space that is given to your charms and your talents in my newspapers——"

"There certainly has been a lot recently," smiled Savile. "In the last few weeks, Jerry, I haven't picked up a single one of your morning or evening papers without seeing a photograph or something about Ysabel in it."

"And rightly!" cried Ysabel.

"Your accusation is chust, Charlie. But these excessive manifestations regarding Ysabel's beauty and talents are due, not to my lof, which is sincere, but to the machinations of my son, who is a fool——"

"I resent that!" cried Ysabel.

"Nefertheless," boomed old Townleigh, "young Raphael is a fool! He vos born entirely against my better judgment on a Friday, and he has been a fool ever since. I am told that every blessed day these last

few weeks he haf been down to the offices, and, under vile pretence of taking an interest in the glorious vork of journalism, has inserted into the current issue some flattering comment about this too-flattered young lady. Only to-day I haf given strict instructions to my news-editors that any future comments inserted by dat boy shall be at once expungated. But the lof my staffs haf for Raphael is so deep that I vill not swear to the expungation. Also Freddy Messenger is on his side."

"Hooray!" cried Ysabel. "Jerry, your Raphael came to see me to-night——"

Savile warned her to silence by twitching a finger of the hand that still clasped his under the table.

"You should disencourage him!" boomed old Townleigh, looking menacingly about him. "Where is the boy now? I shall disencourage him myself."

"Oh, I do!" sighed Ysabel huskily, laughing at Savile and pressing his hand in return to assure him that of course she wouldn't breathe a word about young Raphael's silly lapse with the diamond.

"That is a good girl, Ysabel. It is I who am your natural mate, or, failing me, this Safile boy, but not my Raphael, who is excessively addicted to seriousness in his lofs. Certainly you must disencourage him, Ysabel, else you will break the boy's heart."

"Darling, how do you know? I might fall in love with him."

"You vill not!" boomed Lord Townleigh. "I feel your character in my heart, Ysabel. Have some champagne."

Ysabel's hand on his had, gradually, deliciously, as though thrust a wedge of pleasure into Savile's consciousness. The point of the wedge—that is, when she had first laid her hand on his and he in his mind had taken as little notice of it as of the passage of a fly—had imperceptibly widened to a feeling, very novel in his loneliness, of intimacy, of support, of fondness. He wondered at himself for the curiously, aggressively

wrong way in which he had hitherto thought of her.

Old Townleigh suddenly poked him in the ribs and, with a glance at Ysabel, who was at that moment refusing to dance with some one, said:

"I want to speak to her alone, Charlie——"

"About Raphael?"

"Absolutely. The boy thinks he is in lof with her. Now Ysabel is a nice girl, but money will always——"

"She has no designs on him, I assure you, Jerry. I don't think she's in the least a gold-digger."

"Nefertheless," old Townleigh whispered, draining Savile's glass of champagne, "she is a Tough Baby. I am full of shrewd suspicions about Tough Babies. I have had nearly sixty years experience of enjoying but avoiding Tough Babies. And the conclusion I have come to is that they are unsuitable for boys, especially rich boys. For you and me, yes. We know where to stop. For a boy like Raphael, no. I shall not be happy until he is disinfected of her."

"What's this?" Ysabel turned swiftly round.

Old Townleigh, his shoulder to Ysabel, engineered what to Savile appeared to be a catastrophic disturbance over his face by slowly, immensely, closing and opening one eye. Then he addressed Savile as though he had no idea that Ysabel had turned to them again:

"I haf been entrusted with a commission, Charlie. I will not conceal from you that sexually I am jealous of you. But socially I am your friend. A young lady over there wants to see you for a moment. She wants to greet you. She says maybe you will not remember her, but nefertheless," menacingly boomed old Townleigh, draining Ysabel's glass, "she wants to see you about somedinks——"

"I'll bet it's that Vardon girl," said Ysabel bitterly. "She's been looking over here ever since we came in and asking Serle about you."

"Your inspiration is chust, Ysabel, but your in-

sinuation is unchust. Have some champagne. I haf every reason to believe that the first snows of winter are as liquorice compared with Venetia's character. She is beautiful and good. Nefertheless," boomed old Townleigh, "she vants to see our Charlie for a moment——"

"Charles, don't go, *don't* go!" Ysabel begged savagely, imperiously.

Savile, to extract a cigarette from his case, had to withdraw his hand from hers.

"Charles, if you go . . ."

"I haven't seen her for years, Ysabel. And it's nice of her to have remembered me. I'll be back in one moment."

"Boy, champagne!" boomed old Townleigh.

"But you won't dance with her? Promise? Such a small promise, honey!"

How irritating, how useless, such "small" demands are! For by the very fact of trying to excuse themselves by pointing out how "small" they are, how "small" and therefore how easy to be acceded to, they drive us into defying them from a "large" point of view, into defying them with that "better" part of our natures that conveniently urges us: "Oh, away with these small points!"

"Lof!" sighed Lord Townleigh, "what a fool I could make of myself for lof! O baby, you'd be surprised! Have some champagne, Ysabel."

Savile had risen.

"You *are* in a hurry, aren't you!" Ysabel flashed up at him.

Savile was trying to recapture the strange strained atmosphere of that summer afternoon six years before. At that time he had had many of those bad days: when, intensely and helplessly disliking himself, disapproving of himself in every way, he used to derive a sort of pleasure from presenting himself in such a light to some one he had just met that they couldn't help

but dislike him. How convincingly unnatural self-disapproval can make one seem!

He realised that Ysabel had just said something. "What?" he asked.

"Have some champagne," whispered old Townleigh, "'06. The other guests have got '14. Once a Jew, always a Scot."

Ysabel's eyes were brilliant with a rush of anger. But a moment before she had been youth, brilliant and kind and eager. Now she was the courtesan in arms.

"For God's *sake*!" she snapped up at him.

Savile stared at her not really seeing her. He was staring, really at himself. "Good . . . *Lord*!" he thought. He had suddenly realised that for the last half-hour he had been thinking seriously of a life with Ysabel. . . .

She was saying, trying to say lightly: "Don't go, darling—do sit down and be comfortable!"

Good Lord! "Quite one of the most beautiful women to be seen bathing at the Lido this year is Mrs. Charles Savile. Of course it will be remembered that before her marriage to the well-known novelist she was Miss Ysabel Fuller. . . ."

Savile had a vision of a life with Ysabel that would be one endless bickering about the degree of possession. "I love you so much that I don't do so-and-so, but you don't even love me enough not to do this-and-that."

Ysabel's immense luminous eyes unwaveringly followed his back as he walked across the supper-room towards the ballroom and then across to a far corner, where Venetia was sitting with Serle, Tarlyon, Lady Mary Tea and others. Then as Savile joined the group, they suddenly became expressionless as though communication between them and her mind had suddenly been switched off.

She murmured: "All right."

"About my boy," began old Townleigh. . . .

"Give me a glass of that champagne you're always muttering about, Jerry."

"Pearls too I will give you if you cure my Raphael of his foolishness!"

"Pearls!" said Ysabel huskily, and suddenly laughed loudly. People stared round at her. She was watching Savile and Venetia dancing. . . .

"What are you thinking of, Ysabel?"

But still it was as though her eyes did not communicate what they saw to her mind. Thoughtfully she emptied her glass of champagne. Old Townleigh, impassively, refilled it. Suddenly, she turned her face to him, laughing.

"Yes, darling, some one had better cure him, and quickly. He tried to give me an enormous diamond this evening that must have cost somebody a fortune."

It was as though some Christian fanatic had found the masterful old Jew in difficulties and had struck him across the eyes.

Ysabel, at the effect of her bomb, nervously giggled, but pulled herself together and looked cold. If he wanted to look like that, let him! She sipped her champagne. Old Townleigh said not a word. Ysabel refused to feel frightened of him in any way. She took no notice of him, went on smoking, sipping her champagne. They made her tired, these Great Men. . . .

Life is a rushing river with invisible banks, but people like Ysabel not only think they can see the banks but that they can throw a stick into the river with the certainty that it will be carried in a given direction; and when their stupid little stick unaccountably becomes the centre of a seething whirlpool they are undecided whether to turn away with a shrug, to be ashamed of themselves, or to be angry.

Ysabel had known that old Townleigh would be angry with Raphael. She had not dreamt that he would

be so passively, horribly, grotesquely hurt. She tried, anyhow, not to believe that he was. She wanted to despise him for his avarice, not to be awed by his suffering. So she tried, even as she felt a twinge of shame for the vulgarity of her reasoning, to ascribe the effect of her words on him to his love of money. She wanted urgently to lighten her conscience by letting him show her that he was thinking of it all from a beastly, *common* point of view.

"Gosh!" she said at last, trying to laugh, "don't worry so, darling! I gave it back to him all right!"

"So!" breathed old Townleigh, staring at the tablecloth. And he stared at the tablecloth as though there was nothing in the world but that tablecloth. Then he breathed: "Thank you, thank you."

"Why, you don't think I'd take it, do you!" said Ysabel coldly. For Ysabel, like every courtesan in the world, was far prouder of the gifts she refused than of those she accepted.

"So that," said old Townleigh calmly, "is why he is not here to-night. He was afraid. I see."

"He needn't have been really," said Ysabel, with a nervous laugh. "I don't know what made me tell you. I don't suppose I would have if he had come. Savile and Freddy made me promise not to tell a soul, certainly not you. At least, they were so certain I wouldn't that they didn't even make me promise——"

"So, Messenger was there!" Old Townleigh eagerly turned his eyes to her from the tablecloth, enveloped her eagerly, as though Mr. Messenger's presence made all the difference. "Then it was all a joke! Have some champagne."

"Oh, yes, we had quite a party! And——" Ysabel began laughing huskily as though something very funny had suddenly occurred to her. She gulped down her champagne. "He hit Freddy," she said.

"What!" roared old Townleigh. The two or three

people who still lingered at the other end of the supper-room stared.

"Ssh!" said Ysabel.

The old man, transfixing her with menacing eyes, said slowly: "The boy struck Freddy Messenger—before you!"

"Darling!" cried Ysabel, swept so entirely out of her depth that she could not stop to wonder at the might of that masculine, of the earth earthy "before you!"

He inclined towards her confidentially.

"Do you think my boy is mad, Ysabel?"

Ysabel, floundering in the contrary currents of her senseless revenge, eager now to make all the amends she could for her betrayal of young Raphael, tried hard to puzzle out what answer might best help to soften his father towards him.

"Darling," she began, in the tone of one who embarks on a serious but favourable analysis of some one's character; but something in old Townleigh's look cut her short. She quivered with anger. He stroked his beard, smiling at her with eyes that dismissed her, as only Orientals can suddenly dismiss women, to the lower order of masculine pleasures. She tried to stare him out. She tried to make herself unattainable, remote. How far away was America, where women can "put it all over" men, and particularly Jews! His desire and his disdain silently mocked her, made her feel "inexpensive." The old brute. She felt like a thing in a bazaar. She looked away. Absently, she took a cigarette from his enormous leather-case. He held a match for her. Her eyes stared blindly through the sharp little flame.

Old Townleigh's beard brushed her shoulder as he bent forwards to her.

"Don't!" she said sharply, and moved forward a little.

He said thoughtfully to the brooding beautiful profile: "It's a bad business, Ysabel. I am very un-

happy about Raphael. And this is the worst of all —this striking of our friend Freddy."

She said impatiently: "Oh, Freddy didn't give a damn!"

"It is I who am giving a ton of damns, my child. To steal is bad enough—but what can you say of a man who strikes a good friend, a friend who will not hit back and who has always stood up for Raphael? That is a terrible sin. Raphael shall be punished. He shall be punished severely. Have some champagne, Ysabel."

He smiled at her with those proud and boisterous eyes of his. . . .

She said sharply: "Why are you looking at me like that?"

He stroked his beard, smiling at her.

"And you, Ysabel, shall help me to punish Raphael."

"Like hell I will! I'm sick to death of the lot of you!"

"Haven't I been kind to you, Ysabel? Haven't I helped you?"

"Yes, of course, but——" suddenly she saw something in those eyes, something that would have infuriated her but for the champagne she had drunk, something that made her begin laughing and go on laughing almost hysterically.

"Why, Jerry, I believe *you're* making love to me now!" She laughed helplessly, and it was that laugh that, as he made his way back through the crowd to rejoin his host and Ysabel, met Savile. It awoke him, like a discordant noise. He had been dreaming. He had been dreaming the one great dream that there is, which is to live out one's dream instead of dreaming out one's life.

Old Townleigh, sitting a little behind Ysabel, his massive face close to her flaming hair, looked up at him as he approached with that mischievous, testing smile of his which he reserved for the men who had engaged his affections. Old Townleigh was a good friend.

"So, Charlie! You and our friend Messenger were going to protect my own son from me, were you!"

Ysabel, her elbow on the table, her hand to her mouth, was smoking. He remembered the faintly greasy feel of the cigarette she had thrust between his lips. A feeling of repulsion for himself swept over him. The idea of Venetia retreated to the stars. He had been messing about with this thing here. His fancy lady. But now she was staring straight in front of her, taking no notice of him at all. She was flushed.

"Why on earth did you tell him, Ysabel? Why should you want to hurt Raphael?"

Ysabel stared straight in front of her, smoking. The corners of her nose needed powdering.

"Raphael? I wanted to hurt you."

"But why, Ysabel?"

"Because."

"But why did you think that your telling the old man about Raphael would hurt me?"

"You mean, how did I penetrate the depths of your marvellous character so far down as to find out that you would be hurt by my telling him?"

"If you like."

Ysabel turned to look at him for the first time since he had rejoined them. Her eyes were expressionless with contempt. She said: "Because you are one of those conceited cads who think it's mighty fine to be indifferent to people who like you but like to fancy yourself Christ by worrying yourself sick about people who don't even know you are alive."

Old Townleigh chuckled: "The girl has exactly described the Liberal Party!"

Savile, across Ysabel's back, said to him: "I've absolutely no interest in what you are going to do to that young man of yours——"

"You relieve me," boomed old Townleigh. "Have some champagne."

"But I'd just like to point out that the poor kid

would probably not have tried to give Ysabel the diamond at all if he hadn't been goaded to it by the silly fuss she was making of me."

Ysabel, with her hand still holding her cigarette to her lips, turned her eyes to Savile. There was absolute dislike in them. But he did not even glance at her. He was looking at old Townleigh.

"I'm cured of that all right," she said.

"Good!" boomed old Townleigh. "Therefore I shall shortly make a demonstration of my own physical charms. Have some champagne, Ysabel."

Savile said: "Look here, Jerry, a friendly question —why don't you for once in a way treat one of your children as a human being and not as one of *your* children?"

Old Townleigh, stroking his beard, said amiably: "I'm not sure I understand you, Charlie. I manage my children in my own way, and——"

Savile laughed.

"But you haven't enough, Jerry!"

"Enough what?"

"Children. A man who manages his children in his own way needs at least forty if he wants one to survive the ordeal. You've only got two. At least, you *had* two."

"Now then, Charlie! You remember that row we had years ago on my yacht, when I got so mad I nearly had you thrown overboard?"

"Yes, about Esther."

Old Townleigh said violently: "Do not mention that name!"

Ysabel snapped: "Christ, can't you two talk lower!"

Old Townleigh grasped Savile's shoulder. "Listen, Charlie. Do not provoke me any more to-night with your humanitarian nonsense. This is bad news I've had about Raphael. He's my only child now, and I've got to do the best I can for him——"

"All right, Jerry, I don't want to provoke you. But I came here to-night for a special reason. Just answer me one question: how long is it since you've seen Esther?"

Old Townleigh said: "The boy wants to force a quarrel on me. But old Jerry cannot be provoked when a beautiful woman is sitting by him. When did I see the girl last, Charlie? You and Freddy were with me, my friend, the last time I saw her. Since then she has neither asked to see me nor asked me for anything. Have some champagne."

Ysabel, without turning her head, snapped: "For God's sake shut *up* about your champagne!"

Savile said: "Asked! Why wait to be asked? Why can't you give without being asked?"

"Because," said old Townleigh, "that is my nature."

Saville thoughtfully put out his cigarette and, after a pause, said:

"Then, Jerry, you must take a holiday from your nature to-morrow morning. Esther is very dangerously ill at the Charing Cross Hospital. It began with a chill and developed into pneumonia. She's been smoking and drinking too much for years, and Doctor Barton—you had better ask for him—is afraid she hasn't much power of resistance left. So you had better go and ask her forgiveness, Jerry, while she's still there to forgive you."

Old Townleigh, bending forward in his chair, his elbows on his knees, was staring intently at the nape of Ysabel's neck. The flaming hair, where it approached Ysabel's white skin, growing shorter and shorter, stiffer and stiffer, became almost black as though with mortification at its premature death.

Then he suddenly interlocked his massive fingers, palms downwards, and cracked their joints. The sickening little noises made Ysabel turn completely round in her chair and stare at him. The beautiful white face, so severe in profile, the violet eyes, the

velvet mouth, the soft white throat, the firm full breasts outlined under the thin silver dress. . . .

Intent on some hidden impulse, Ysabel stared fixedly at the great black-bearded face. Savile had a queer feeling that she was willing the old man to maintain his unbending attitude, that she would rise and leave the table if the old man "went back" on himself.

Then old Townleigh suddenly raised an outstretched hand and, sweeping it downwards through his beard, turned his eyes to Savile with, Savile could only astonishingly explain to himself, the smile of a prisoner on parole who, given a chance of escape, is too honourable to take it.

He said:

"If she needs anything, Charlie. Money. . . ."

"That's all right," said Savile abruptly, and rose from his chair. Old Townleigh's eyes followed his face upwards. Ysabel never took hers from old Townleigh. Savile vaguely wondered what she was "at." The shover. Pulling or shoving, always. . . .

Old Townleigh said: "Charlie, you're a clever boy, but you don't understand some things. We must all act with the roots of our minds. I have done so all my life. I cannot change now, Charlie. I freely forgive Esther. Tell her. Listen, Charlie. I may be wrong, I may have been wrong all my life. But I do not think so. It may have been wrong of me to have expected love and obedience from my children. I do not think so. But if I have been wrong, if I have been cruel, I would rather not know it. Much rather. That is all, Charlie. I have been at many death-beds, and when people are dying they sometimes put all the strength of their souls into speaking a great falsehood which they have made themselves believe. Do you know, Charlie, that self-pity is the last barricade that life puts up against death? If Esther's last words to me were that she forgave me for having been a cruel father—then, because we are none of us so free from

superstition as to entirely withstand the authority of death, I might come to believe her judgment of me, and my position as a man would become untenable——"

Savile, staring at an unlighted cigarette in his hand, said: "It seems to me that every man's position is untenable. Isn't that the whole difficulty?"

Old Townleigh chuckled. "If I believed that, my friend, what a failure I'd have made of my life!" He added affectionately, for old Townleigh was a good friend: "And you, Charlie, who have been such an astonishing success, what a failure *you're* going to make of life—unless some woman like Ysabel here gets hold of you."

"Thank you," said Ysabel huskily, and turned away.

Savile said quickly: "All right, Jerry. Good-night. Good-night, Ysabel."

Ysabel, without turning her head, said softly, as though she was thinking out loud: "Good-night—you poor white trash!"

BOOK THREE

WE have, in this affair, to watch Savile for a short while.

Savile had come to have a horror of what is called "passing the time." It doesn't, after all, need the finest perception to see that time makes in just "passing" a distressingly silly tinkling noise. And Savile in his day had pretty completely been that type of sexual fool who has found such poignant expression in the grand series of Mr. Wells's novels. Time and again he had stumbled urgently into intimacies that had presently shaken his very soul with boredom and misery and solitude and shame. Time and again he had been astonished and humiliated by the incredible shallowness of most personal relations. Until one day he had found what many men must be finding every day, that for some extraordinary reason he had for years been living a life that was quite unlike himself, a life that was in fact quite the opposite of the life to which his character naturally inclined, that he had for years been misbehaving—with endless trouble and distress—quite regardless of the tremendous fact that he had neither talent nor inclination for misbehaviour of any kind.

It is said that most women have an extra sense which can instantly see such falsenesses in men, that they can instantly perceive the constant man moving uneasily beneath the surface of the inconstant lover. That is what is said.

Savile was one of those men who from their earliest youth are predestined to melancholy owing to the excessive activity of the germ of hope within them. "Hope springs eternal," etc. But it doesn't, in most

men, spring far, nor does its springing outlast a short season. They "get over it." They "grow up." They are to be congratulated. Whereas who is more pitiable than he for whom hope wears the face of a beautiful woman whose beauty suggests something more beautiful than itself? Who is more to be pitied than he who falls in love with hope as with a siren behind whose beautiful voice sings another, scarcely audible but how much more beautiful? We can deal with sirens, we can shoo them away or we can give way to them, we can run away or we can love and be damned. We can deal with Ysabel. But we are helpless before the suggestion, the magic whisper, of beauties more beautiful than any we yet know. There never has been found any end to the lure of beauty that suggests something more than itself, nor any limit to the perseverance with which men will pursue a phantom that appeases the vanity of our dreams. What is interesting in men is not their self-seeking but their instinct for self-immolation. Add to this the paradox that the better a man "knows," as the saying is, "his world," the more indomitably he will believe, in a locked-up and never-locked part of his himself, in the possibility of a better one—and you have Savile and his like.

It was the most natural thing in the world for Savile at the age of thirty-seven to fall in love with Venetia. She happened to him as the fulfilment of a conviction. In her, in the look and the idea of her, his hunger and his hopes were caught up and joined together and appeased. She suggested all those things to which he was being pushed by his revolt from the failures of his personal life. It was as though, in the second of meeting her at old Townleigh's party, there had been presented to him, with the terrifying and beautiful suddenness of heaven-sent gifts—"marriages are made in Heaven"—an exquisite vase so wrought as to hold every flower of his hopes and dreams. She was the portrait of his conviction that there *was* happiness.

That portrait, of course, was painted by the imagination. It is difficult to conceive of a more conceited artist than any man's imagination. Let us praise the imagination! A glorious and tempestuous artist is the imagination! He never dreams of asking his sitter's permission before beginning his portrait. But the portrait does not take him long to paint. The imagination is a swift artist. All the same, genius informs his portrait, for the imagination of even a fool is a man of genius. The portrait is superb. Later, however, he may, he probably will, show it to her and point out with sorrowful pride how he has flattered her. She has not "lived up" to the portrait . . . which she never asked him to paint.

Oh, what a grand artist is the imagination! He is a barbarian who is also a man of taste. He is a pagan who understands God. He paints the grandeur of the indescribable. Like Leonardo, he is the god of his art. He makes a smile eternal. He puts form to infinity. He paints his lady against the universe. The sky has been searched for stars that will do justice to her eyes. The rosy pallor of dawn caresses her cheeks. She walks upon the ancient and august thoroughfare of human destiny. But these things are nothing. It is on her expression that he lavishes his genius. She is sad. The sadness of the world is in her faint smile. Alas, she is sad because she is solitary.

There is nothing at all surprising in that. The first article of love's imagination decrees that the woman we love—and about whom we as yet know absolutely nothing—is lonely. How fittingly a woman's solitude adorns our love for her!

On the fourth morning after old Townleigh's party Savile rang her up on the telephone and asked her to dine with him.

She said she would. "Yes, I'd like to. . . ."

He was conscious of not being at his best during that telephone conversation. He found himself utterly

unable to hold his tongue. He could hear his own voice, affected and stupid. It is astounding how self-disapproval corrupts the sincerity of one's voice. Mount Wyroc was undoubtedly right, it was a pity he had not been born a gentleman. Gentlemen, apparently, did not suffer from self-disapproval. One side of him, over that confounded telephone, revolted from the other even as years ago, young snob that he had been, he had once turned away with a hot face from a dear old Yankee friend of his who had tried to "tip" the English secretary of a Riviera Golf Club and had been snubbed by that gentlemanly young man. He could not, therefore, blame her voice for sounding cold. She couldn't, after all, know that during the three days and nights since he had last seen her she had become the most intimate friend he had in the world. His beautiful friend.

She was, in point of fact, and despite his affected and stupid voice, very nice to him. The distance of her voice was merely that of geography. She was calm, charming. There was an unforgettable moment when she said:

"I'm so glad you rang up."

That was unforgettable, beautiful. So simple. All words of one syllable.

"I was beginning," she said, "to think that maybe you had forgotten me again and that I should have to wait another six years before our third meeting. . . ."

Then he asked her to dine with him, and she answered: "Yes, I'd like to. . . ."

She made the conversation, one would think, sufficiently easy for him. Nevertheless, that conversation was fated to be his cross. He simply had, apparently, to make a silly ass of himself. For no earthly reason he found himself slithering about with some words about going to a play "afterwards." He hated going to plays "afterwards."

She said: "A play?"

He slithered about. . . .

She said: "No. I want to talk to you."

That was what she said: "I want to talk to you.

He said eagerly, passionately: "And I want to talk to you."

He heard something high, sharp, smothered.

He said: "You're laughing!"

She said: "Aren't you?"

PRESENTLY he took Mr. Messenger out to luncheon. Mr. Messenger was serious and depressed. For one thing he was not feeling well, and for another he said: "One's friends worry one."

Savile glanced at him guiltily. He had not been to see Esther these last two days. There was something frightening, horrible, about Esther's sulky resignation. She didn't want one, she just didn't want one. Her soul seemed to mock any one's ability to help her. Her soul seemed to be for ever saying those confounded words with which insufferable men try to clinch arguments: "All that's merely words."

Mr. Messenger said that Dr. Barton had told him yesterday that even if Esther got better, which was exceedingly unlikely, he would have to take some sort of steps about her as a drug-addict.

"I told old Townleigh this morning," he added.

"What did he say?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all."

There was a pause, and then Savile said slowly: "Damn her. Just damn her."

Mr. Messenger went on eating cold ham. They were in the grill-room of the Hyde Park Hotel, where cold ham is very delicious on a warm day.

The sweetness of life welled up in Savile like a fountain, sparkling and eternal. For when a fountain is playing it looks as though it had been playing always and must play for ever. But it has not, it does not.

Mr. Messenger murmured: "I know, I know. . . ."

Beside the sparkling fountain was a dungheap. Life can be so sweet . . . and people like Esther, obstinate as sophisticated flies, can make such an unholy thing of it.

"Of course," said Mr. Messenger, "she won't be . . ."

"She won't be what?"

"Damned."

Savile said: "Oh, and who knows that better than Esther? That's at the bottom of all the world's muck —the unholy conceit of people who, no matter what they do, are certain that God will understand."

"You ought not to say that, Charles. It's too easy."

"What I'm saying is that Esther has been bad, has lived badly, and is dying badly. And it makes me angry because once upon a time I thought she was a goddess. People have no right to make such messes of their lives, Freddy. We all live so close together in this world that their messes somehow keep on *including* us."

"There ought," Mr. Messenger smiled, "to be only one epitaph for every man or woman among us who dies. It is the only possible epitaph. *What he or she knows now, we do not know.*"

Savile muttered without conviction that it ought also to be possible for two men to argue without chucking gravestones at each other. He remembered having once known a man who always carried a miniature coffin in his pocket. During an argument the fellow would quietly bring the confounded thing out and, without a word, put it in some prominent place. He was killed in the war, and all his friends were glad.

They walked towards Hyde Park Corner, whence Freddy Messenger would take a 'bus to Fleet Street. Savile tried not to look so happy as he felt. *I want to talk to you.* How deliciously, how simply, with

what unfrothy decision, as though each word was a firm small-boned word instead of the sloppy bulging ones people generally used, she had said that. *I want to talk to you.* She was unhappy. Oh darling! A profound elation moved him at the thought that her unhappiness would soon become a part of him. He would, he knew, *agree* with her unhappiness. And how seldom one really agreed with people's unhappiness, although one often put up a great show of sympathising and the like. . . .

Mr. Messenger said: "About Esther's little boy——"

Savile said: "That's all right. I arranged with her about young Michael."

"She was very touched by your offer, Charles. But old Townleigh spoke to me about the kid this morning. I told him you were going to see to him and fix him up in life. He was furious, saying he was the proper guardian for the boy. So that may be the best way out."

"All right. I'll do whatever's best."

"I shouldn't wonder if the cause of all the trouble became the apple of the old man's eye. It's a rum world."

"And what about young Raphael?"

Savile was surprised to hear that the old man had so far taken no disciplinary measures of any kind. "Apparently, anyhow," added Freddy Messenger. "That poor young ass! He'd have been happy now if he had been allowed to marry Venetia."

They were at Hyde Park Corner, waiting for Mr. Messenger's 'bus.

"Hope there's room on top," said Mr. Messenger.

Savile said: "Were they in love, Raphael and—and Venetia?"

"I don't know Venetia's end of it, except, of course, that she had always been very fond of young Raphael. It would have been an excellent marriage for them both."

Savile said: "I scarcely know either of them."

"They're good people," said Mr. Messenger. "Here's my 'bus. Thank you for lunch, Charles."

Savile said: "And why didn't they marry?"

"Probably Venetia wouldn't have him, anyhow. But old Townleigh wouldn't hear of it. . . ."

"That 'bus is full," Savile said. "But I thought the old scoundrel and Vardon's daughter were such friends?"

"Oh, they were, they are! But don't forget that the old man is a practising Jew. He'd prefer his only surviving son to marry a Jewess. And besides . . ."

"Besides?"

"Well, I suppose—not unnaturally, he took the worldly view."

Savile said: "The 'worldly' view?"

"He didn't, you know, want his only son to marry—well, you know how Serle and Venetia are bracketed together."

Savile realised that he had been thinking a great deal about Serle for the last few days. That one! The beauty! The great man! He suddenly made up his mind about Serle. Serle wasn't his, Savile's, business.

"Oh, that!" he said.

Savile was suddenly in a very good temper. What fools there were in the world! Fools who would make themselves wretched about a man like Serle. He found it absurdly easy to overlook Serle, to ignore Serle, to forget Serle. Anyhow, the devil take Serle. He forgot Serle.

Mr. Messenger said: "Now don't tell me this 'bus is full! Good-bye, Charles. Ysabel rang me up this morning, obviously wanting to hear about you."

Savile said: "Now don't let's talk about *her*!" That menacing evocation out of a world of powder, perfume, and paint disturbed his meditations on Venetia. Ysabel was a disturbing woman, an unquiet phantom. She didn't know her place. She was one of

those women who take immediate advantage of one's lapse in thinking of them. Instantly, if one happened to think of her, she arose before one in all the splendour of the flesh and stared at one with insolent disregard of the fact that she wasn't really there at all but one had only thought of her, as the English say, *en passant.* She was one of those women who are always shifting their betters from one's mind. As a remembered strain of some cheap tune drives . . . that kind of thing. He forgot Ysabel. Walking home to Mount Street, it amused him that he could somehow recreate nothing of Venetia's face but her upper lip. It was a very delicate, quiet upper lip. It seemed to quiver a little, as though in rhythm to the beat of her pulse and her heart.

He had no sooner entered his flat than his servant gave him a letter. It had come by hand. There were just a few lines, written with the sort of pencil one finds in post-offices. When he had read it, Savile asked:

"When did this come?"

It had come at about noon, not five minutes after he had gone out.

"Then," Savile said very bitterly, "if you had exerted yourself to run a little way you could have caught me up and given it to me then."

For it seemed to him, with that note in his hand, enormously important that he should have read it earlier, before luncheon. It seemed to him that the frightfulness of that note would have been almost discounted had he only read it earlier. He couldn't, then, have committed himself to those thoughts of happiness, he couldn't mentally have bound himself to the joy of being with her. He found it acutely, physically, unbearable, the contrast between his state of mind since their talk on the telephone—and now! Is there anything quite like the hot feeling of running oneself out of breath to keep an appointment—only to

find that the other never had any intention of keeping it? He read the note again.

I can't dine, after all. I am so sorry—sorry, I mean, because I wanted to so much. It came so easy and natural to say "Yes" when you asked me over the telephone. But just things can be terribly aggressive, can't they? They pile up suddenly. I am sure you will try to understand. All sorts of very odd things seem always to be happening in my life. We seem to be fated, don't we, to meet only at intervals of not less than six years! Good-bye. Venetia.

"Serle!" he said. "Good God, Serle!"

A fury of self-contempt possessed him. He'd dream of her, delight in her, think of her "permanently," would he! *I want to talk to you.* The words grinned at his aloneness. He felt intolerably alone. It was three o'clock in the afternoon. The room was bright and joyous with sunlight. How sunlight points an ache, makes loneliness throb!

I want to talk to you. What a joke!

He felt absolutely unable even to imagine what he was going to do with himself, then or ever. *All sorts of very odd things seem always to be happening in my life.* Well, wasn't it damned odd that here he suddenly was, he, Savile, here he was, alone in a wilderness? How pass that afternoon, that evening, that night? It was serious, that question. Serious, anyhow, in the sense that no amount of "laughing at oneself"—"Come, my boy, where's your sense of humour?"—would answer it. To-morrow! And lo, to-morrow stretched out before his desperate eyes, stretched out for ever, a long dark passage of desolation.

Whereas, she had Serle. Decidedly, she had Serle. Nice company for a girl. Great man, Serle. The swine. *Just things can be terribly aggressive, can't they?* Things=Serle.

He, on the other hand, had Ysabel, if he wanted her. Come here, kid. And she'd come. What hell. The Serles and Ysabels of life. The ones who Get On. And he'd been thinking of something fine. . . .

Ysabel, of course, at the first flicker of a thought about her, arose and stared at him. She had those strange deep eyes in which a man can see an image of himself as ugly as sin. She stared at him, a little hostile disturbance at the corners of her mouth. How beautiful. How damned unsatisfying. The competitive and pushing muck of this world in a lovely body. He'd seen them, the place reeked with them, from Hollywood to Chelsea . . . "girls" being an Anglo-Saxon vice. Abroad, a woman is decent or a whore . . . girls, their faces as blank as the workers in Ford's factory in Detroit, their eyes vaguely intent, their mouths splashed all over their silly pretty faces, lighting cigarettes with idle grubby fingers. That puppy life, making casual messes everywhere. Young men and women wrote novels about that kind of thing . . . cigarettes, cocktails, fornication . . . and reviewers said: "Mr. Slob (or Miss Blob) has lavished a great deal of savage indignation on an unworthy subject. It must be admitted, however, that Mr. Slob (or Miss Blob) has painted an amazingly true picture of the modern generation." Idiots. Oh God, idiots!

Well, there was always, as a last resource, solitude. Solitude . . . with the world teeming in your head and an ache for the beautiful friend. Solitude! Well, he had tried that for years. . . .

And then she had come suddenly. Some one clean and sincere. No more sin, no more cruelty. The beautiful friend. . . .

From the beginning life had promised her to him.

We seem to be fated to meet at intervals of not less than six years. Good-bye. Venetia. He could not stand that. He simply could not stand that. . . .

A realisation suddenly made him quite calm. The

realisation was so awful, there was nothing to do but be calm. He stared at himself calmly. He had realised that for the first time in his life he had got to the bottom of himself. Never before had he lived, thought, loved, done anything, but with the surface of himself. He had been *acting* himself, until this moment. Now, for some reason, he couldn't act himself any longer, he couldn't watch himself, applaud, condemn himself. He *was* himself. His feeling of desolation, deprivation, nothingness, was real. He wasn't putting anything on. Savile, like most other men, had in the past found himself out, had "called his own bluff," in wretchednesses that were at bottom quite insincere, almost non-existent. But this, now, where he stood now, was the ultimate frontier of his ability to stand himself as he was. He saw that quite clearly. Seeing himself, being himself—he felt it was utterly impossible to endure himself for another moment. He was quite calm. He thought: "Very well. Here I am. What is there for me to do? I am through with myself. I can't go on living alone, and I can't live with the second-best. My writing doesn't fill my life. I am a failure at everything but being the sort of 'success' I despise with all my heart—and I'm even a failure at that now. I can't go on like this, it's impossible. I've lived anyhow—and hated it. I've lived decently—and that's no good. I've tried . . . and now what is there left to try for?"

Thus, the lark climbed down from the bright sky and hid in a cellar. The fine dreams were ended. Vanity shed its bright feathers, hope gave a sigh and vanished. What are dreams purged of arrogance! What is humility without pride! What is piracy without powder and shot!

(*a*) *I want to talk to you.*

On the other hand,

(*b*) *We seem to be fated to meet at intervals of not less than six years.*

(*c*) *Good-bye. Venetia.*

(*d*) And she had signed herself *Venetia*!

Good Lord, he hadn't thought of that before. Venetia! Forward girl. . . .

He was in the street before his servant could catch him up with his hat. Then he loitered a while beneath the trees in Grosvenor Square. The square was aflame with sunlight. All around him London edged up into the shining sky, the spires and domes and towers and roofs edged up into the sunlight from the rank undergrowth of centuries.

He crossed the square. Outside the house in Brook Street stood a grubby-looking Rolls-Royce with an old-fashioned limousine body. Often, on leaving the Ministry of Information late at night, he had driven home with Vardon in that veteran Rolls and had come in to have a last drink. Six years had passed since then. He felt much younger now. No, not younger, but much more ignorant, much less self-assured. Six years ago he would have walked up to the door of the house in Brook Street without a second's hesitation.

The door of the house was wide open. In the doorway stood the chauffeur, a short elderly man with a walrus moustache who looked like a gardener and probably was a gardener. He was talking with Trellis. Between them stood a dressing-case in an over-cover of dark blue cloth. Savile avoided looking at the initials on the cover and attended strictly to the business on hand. At his approach, Trellis and the chauffeur—who was probably also a gardener—instantly parted asunder with that maddening obsequiousness of English servants which makes any man who is not an idiot or a Duke feel acutely self-conscious for having disturbed a private conversation. Savile said to Trellis coldly:

"Is Miss Vardon at home?"

He had never before been in that house by daylight. The wide hall was dim and cool. There was a great window at the far end shielded by a faded red-and-

white sun-blind. It was a friendly house, quiet and worn, like a greyish sort of man who is perfectly willing to be pleasant but doesn't care much whether you do or don't find him so. There were tulips and roses, but they were quiet too, not bright. It was a man's house. That surprised Savile, because he had vaguely heard that for quite a while Jasper Vardon had not lived at Brook Street but had settled permanently at Lacey Moat. There would be a woman in that. In the muted sunlight the portrait of Vardon looked quite gentle, almost like the portrait of an English Gentleman. Orpen would be pretty sick about that.

The great window opened out to a small grey courtyard. He could see, beneath the sun-blind, only uneven grey stones girt by a crawling tracery of dark green lines. Savile was bending beneath the sun-blind to step out into the little grey square, but abruptly he changed his mind.

All his failures gathered together around this second of his life and jeered at him.

"I must get out of this," he thought.

In the small grey court was a white wicker arm-chair, a copy of the *Times,* a small table, and, as though coquettishly attracting the sunlight over an angle of the high walls, a silver ash-tray rank with cigar-ash and the chewed stump of a cigar.

And a voice behind him said:

"Charles! I say, Charles! Good-afternoon, Charles. I've made up my mind to call you Charles bang off and get it over."

He had wanted, above everything in the world, just to see her. Now he found it extraordinarily difficult to look round at her. When he did, he didn't take her in. The dim lounge looked brighter.

He said: "I don't quite know why I've come, except that I had to see you."

He thought she said: "But what's the *matter*! You look as though you'd seen a ghost!"

HAVE," it was on his lips to say, but somehow his eyes snatched away the words, he entirely forgot to say them. He saw her. The whole place, and himself with it, seemed to shine with her. It was impossible to think of anything but of being just there with her.

She shone, as though with some wonderful secret. What was the secret? He must know the secret. He laughed, because she was laughing.

She said: "That telephone conversation! Oh dear. . . ."

"That bit about going to a play afterwards!"

"Yes. . . ."

The union of their laughter made his life up to that moment seem incredible to him. He lived again. How frankly she welcomed him into the shy estate of her eyes! He had not imagined that human eyes could be so completely generous. He had not imagined that such happiness could be. He had not imagined that woman could be so beautiful. These things bereft him of speech.

She said: "Yes? We can't stand here for ever, staring at each other. . . ."

"That's just what I *could* do!"

"Charles, how you change! Such a princely name, 'Charles'! When I came in you looked old, a hundred. But now! What was the matter with you when I came in?"

He did not answer, he scarcely heard. All that was over, he did not want to think of it. For him, a new life had begun, a life of love and confidence.

He said: "I came to see you because I had to see you. What have you to say to that?"

"Now it's my turn. I expected you."

"Venetia, how you lie!"

"I did expect you! I'm such a clever girl. I waited for you."

"How happy I am! And I didn't know you cared!"

"You can always rely on me to say the right thing, Charles. The experience I've had! Won't you sit down?"

"No. How beautiful you are, Venetia!"

"I know, I know! Upstairs I have packets of letters to that effect. So encouraging."

"Letters? That's not so good. Letters, Venetia?"

"Yes, darling. From chaps."

"You must destroy them at once. *I* will write you letters."

"Yes, darling. Thank you so much. But you shouldn't stare at me like that, Charles. It's rude."

"I'm not staring. I am looking into your eyes."

"There you are! Eye-talk. . . ."

"Poor Venetia! You get a lot of eye-talk, do you?"

"You know—'God, what eyes!'—that kind. Charles, promise not to say, 'God, what eyes!'"

"Of course I won't say, 'God, what eyes!' My dear Venetia, you don't seem to realise whom you are talking to. I'm a serious man. I do not say 'God, what eyes!' I go further. I go so far as to say that your eyes are great and glorious events, like the birth of Plato, the defeat of Attila, the coronation of Queen Victoria and *Alice in Wonderland*."

"Such enthusiasm! Oh Charles! And can you go *on* like that or are you just flashing about a bit in your pan?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," he confessed, "what I'm talking about. Have you?"

She shook her head slowly.

"Just talking" she said, "is enough for me. Such a change. . . ."

Her eyes, wide and soft with fun and thought, seemed to be measuring him as he stood there against

those thoughts about him which, with a generosity he had never before met in any human being, she didn't attempt to conceal had filled some of the hours since she had last seen him.

He saw her with the wind in her face, the gold crying out in her hair, the sun in her eyes, the charioteer of youth driving horses to the sun. However, she was not dressed for that. She was dressed for walking, talking, luncheon, and tea in a garden. She was very luminous, in the way of a fair woman in a black frock. A soft silken sound came from her as she moved. She wore a pale grey hat, very small and tight. The fair wings of hair beside each cheek looked breathless with good behaviour. Faint scent, or was it powder, blew soft kisses into the air. There was a small diamond circlet in her hat, and a gardenia at her shoulder.

He realised the hat. By God, a hat! It was small, it was scarcely a hat, but it was a hat. He remembered the dressing-case in charge of the chauffeur who was undoubtedly a gardener.

"You're going out—away?"

She stared. A long time passed.

"Yes," she said quickly.

He said: "That's why, then . . . you wrote. . . ."

Her eyes were so big. Staring into them, he saw himself drowning. In a flash all his life passed before him.

She said: "Yes, yes, yes!"

He had forgotten that horrible note. Now, in his mind, he read it slowly over again. *All sorts of odd things seem always to be happening in my life.* Things =Serle.

She cried: "Charles, don't!"

He stared. She laughed helplessly. Then she said: "I meant, don't think *into* things. Clever men should be prevented by law from thinking into things, because once they are inside them they always lose their way and get angry. Clever men should stick to the surface of things. Charles, are you listening?"

He said: "So that's why you wrote that note putting me off. . . . You suddenly decided to go away."

New thoughts seemed to spin new colours into her eyes. They grew darker. She looked along her eyelashes at him.

"So stupid!" she sighed. "And, a minute ago, we were getting on so well. . . ."

He took her hand. He seemed to be thinking very deeply. He pressed the back of her hand with his thumb.

"Oh!" she whispered.

He tried to smile.

"It's important," he said.

"I know. . . ."

"Is it important to you, too?"

She nodded, staring at him.

He tried to smile.

"Venetia," he said, "don't run away from me."

She stared at him dumbly. Her upper lip quivered.

"Cheek!" she said. "As though I was afraid of you!"

"Venetia," he said, "don't go away."

Her eyes filled with tears, the tears that do not fall.

She said: "When you said that, you looked a good ten years old."

"Please don't go away," he said.

"But I *must*!" she cried sharply, and was gone.

"Venetia!"

She was in a far corner of the dim hall. There was a large narrow table there, and some pink roses in a crystal bowl, and boxes of cigars, and a tortoiseshell box for cigarettes. She walked there and took up the box of cigarettes. He followed her, unable to be away from her. He must breathe the air she breathed, he must see what she saw, he must feel what she felt. That was all he knew. There was not a word in his head. His mind was a cup filled with love.

She was lighting a cigarette, her back to him.

She said: "I haven't smoked a cigarette in the afternoon for years. Now I'm doing it because I'm nervous. Why don't you go away!"

She hid her face from him. It was her eyes she was hiding. He knew that. They were generous, she was afraid of them. How long her eyelashes were, long as the moments during which they stole her eyes from him. Arrowy eyelashes, implacable, pitiless.

"What is it, Venetia? Why are things like this?" Her upper lip was faintly quivering as though in rhythm with the beat of her heart.

She said: "This is ridiculous. Perfectly ridiculous. Oh Charles! Good Heavens!"

"You know perfectly well," he said, "that it isn't ridiculous and that you don't think it's ridiculous." He insisted: "Is it?"

She said: "My dear, what's the good! Don't you see? This must stop. Don't you see?" And as she repeated the words she turned her face to him. How it ached in him, the effort she made to do that.

He said: "You must send me away if you don't like what I'm feeling . . . what you know I'm feeling."

She seemed to catch at a gasp. "Why should I know anything about you?"

"I don't know why, but you do. Don't you?"

"Bully!"

"Listen, Venetia. Since I met you again the other night I have found myself for the first time in my life."

She was staring at him with wide-open eyes. Her words were queerly flippant. "Oh, you have, have you? And what about me?" She stopped short, as though she had said more than she intended. He wanted to cry out. "I love you, I love you!" But he was helpless in the dusk of her eyes. That was how it was now, she was suddenly wrapped in dusk, in the

dusk of a day of which there had been only the dawn, no more than the dawn. The day was lost somewhere, lost before it was ever reached, annihilated, a corpse lying in some dark corner of her life.

Dusk and a half-open door. After a long journey through desolate places he had come to a house by the wayside and he had been greeted. Now he was being turned away. He must open that door wide, he must force it wide open. There was dread in her face, the wings of terror darkening her eyes. She had half-opened the door, and now she was closing it. She must not close it, he must not let her.

She was terrified that he would not let her. . . .

"You must *go*," she said.

She did not look at him. Why did she not look at him?

With her, he couldn't snatch, struggle. No fumbling, no shoving in *this*! Her welcome was an essential part of their union, of any good union. Years ago he had promised himself that. When at last he met the right person, she would welcome him. And she had seemed to welcome him. And now she was turning away, shutting him out. He felt helpless, hopeless.

"All right," he said. "I'm going."

It didn't occur to him as he said the words that they really meant anything. But he had no sooner said them than they, as it were, turned back and looked at him and appalled him by their definite shape. He was going. . . .

She said: "Yes. It's better, you see. You do see, don't you?"

"Oh, yes!" he smiled. He hoped it looked like a smile. Oh, yes, he saw. He could overlook Serle, but she couldn't. And why should she? It was perfectly natural. He wondered how on earth he could get away decently, untiresomely. Any sort of "good-bye" must sound almost melodramatic. . . .

She was laughing! There were tears shining in her

eyes. "You idiot!" she said. "You don't really see at all. Oh Charles! You're so *ready* to see something you expected to see that you don't really see at all. . . ."

He stared at her, somehow not understanding a word she said. What did it matter what she said or what he said? There were tears shining in her eyes.

"You see," she said patiently, "it's much better that you go when *I* want you to go—instead of presently going when *you* want to go."

What nonsense it was, talking like this, bothering! He wanted to say to her: "Darling, listen. Don't let's try to explain ourselves to each other any more. It's not necessary, and only gives pain. In trying to help each other we're hurting each other all the time. That's how people are nearly always hurting and being hurt, by not realising how intimate they are with each other, by emphasising things which the other person has already pigeonholed as 'understood.' And, you know, we really understand each other at this moment as well as we ever will, for there's no understanding so complete as that which comes to two people from a recognition of the justice, the rightness, of the other's previous unhappiness."

What she said next astounded him, it was so like an answer to his thoughts.

She said: "We're being silly . . . unwise. Nothing is more unwise than piling up intimate moods which can only lead to . . . nothing."

And she turned away from him. It was a final gesture. Now, he had to go. Her turning away was as much as to say: "Well, this is the end of *this* chapter in my life." What was there he could say to that? It was as though some one in very high authority had said to him: "You, Charles Macaulay Savile, are sentenced to twenty years' solitary confinement." What was there to say to that?

He found himself murmuring: "You are so certain about that 'nothing.' . . ."

"Yes, certain," she said, with that queer absent-minded weariness of one whose thoughts have been pulled back to a decision made long ago.

She was far away from him now, in the mellow light near the faded sun-blind. She was very still, her back to him. She was waiting for him to go. And he could not go, he could not face going. What was there for him to do anywhere else, anywhere in all this world? All the world outside that house seemed hateful to him, as ugly and as desolate as a familiar street on a Sunday.

It was as though she, standing there, had merged herself into her own destiny, had become the personification of her own fate. That, with her back to him, was the figure who had written him that note. *We seem to be fated to meet only at intervals of six years. Good-bye. Venetia.*

"Then," he called across the room, "why the hell did you greet me like that?"

She said something, he could not catch what. Her back was to him, her fingers playing with the cords of the blind. Her stockings shone like sand in the shaft of sunlight beneath the sun-blind.

"What?" he said. He was going.

She turned her face to him. Her enormous eyes seemed to annihilate the yards between them. How dark they were now, as they might be the shadows of themselves in a pool of water. It moved him like a sickness to think that life could have taught her so young how to hide her thoughts so completely from other human things.

A smile flickered about her mouth. She said: "So that's all the thanks I get for waiting nearly all the afternoon for you to come!"

"Just," he said bitterly, "to say good-bye."

It was almost impossible for him to realise that he

had failed in what he had come to do, to exorcise the present, the future, of that wretched note of hers. There is not, apparently, a man in the world, no matter how weak and meek he is by ordinary, who is not convinced that when he wants something very much there is some miraculous power in him which will make everything "all right." That is not optimism, but belief in God.

She said very quickly, with catch after catch in her voice, as though it were a flimsy boat being pushed helterskelter over a weir: "I don't know why I knew you'd come, I don't know what I wanted to tell you. I suppose I wanted a bit of fun. . . ." She pulled herself up, went on calmly: "You see, when I said I'd dine with you to-night I was closing my eyes to circumstances——"

That hurtful emphasising, again, of things already instinctively understood. . . .

He said: "I know. Serle."

She said bitterly: "Not at all! Please don't go on about that!"

That, definitely, was intolerable. "Go on about that? This is the first time I've so much as mentioned his name!"

She was smiling at his indignation in that helpless ruminative way that collects on the face of some one who is seeing a friend off on a long journey.

"Poor Charles! But it has been at the back of your head all the time, hasn't it?"

He said savagely, as though he was getting rid of something: "Yes, all the time, all the time."

They stared at each other in a helplessness that could find no point of contact.

"Oh dear!" she sighed. Then she said reasonably: "Listen, Charles. After I'd said I would see you this evening—and that meant really that I'd be seeing you almost every evening from now onwards, didn't it?"

"Darling," he said in a breaking voice, "what's the good of talking? I love you."

She said quickly: "Ssh! Then something happened that——"

He shouted: "All right, all right, don't tell me that again! I know all about it—all London knows all about it——"

He stood staring at the rug at his feet, trembling. Then he walked away.

She thought: "Now he will slam the door. Fool." But he did not slam the door. She heard the quiet click as it was pulled to. "That's because he's sorry," she thought. "He's sorry now." The house was very quiet after that click of the door. It was always a quiet house, but now it was extra quiet, as quiet as a house would be from which dreams were flitting out on tiptoe. She looked about her, wondering what she was doing there. It was her house, her father had given it to her two years ago, saying: "Take it, do what you like with it. Useful when you're married." She had left it exactly as it was, hadn't changed a thing. What for? Suddenly her eyes filled with tears. But she stared hard at something, and they emptied again. She began pulling on a long fawn-coloured glove. She must go too. She had promised. She wondered how it was she knew him so well, as well as Peter. It was extraordinary how well she knew him. How wretched he would be now, walking he didn't know where, not knowing what to do next. He had hurt himself by that last "stinger," not her. She couldn't be, ever, hurt by things like that She wondered if his address was in the telephone-book. She could write him, telling him not to worry. "I'm getting silly," she thought. He had said, just before he got as sour as a quince: "I love you." No, he hadn't said "I love you," one didn't somehow say "I love you" except in books or on the stage, he had just thrown it in somewhere. And she had believed it, she believed it now. She

stared hard at the fawn-coloured gloves. Yes, it was extraordinary, but she did believe it. She was positive he hadn't thrown "I love you" into any of his conversation with dear Alice Craven and all the others. All the others. He must have known so many women. But that had been a different Savile, a debonair Savile, a hateful Savile. This was a lonely Savile. Suddenly she tried to smile, and found she couldn't and keep her eyes dry. Poor lamb, he was lonely. He used to be in the crowd, writing smart books and all, and full of friends and lovers and importance. Now he was on his little bit of a mountain and lonely. She found to her astonishment that the tears that kept forcing their attentions on her were tears of gladness. "He will find some one nice," she thought. She was glad he was lonely, it was good for him, it was a sign of grace in him. That was why she had believed his "I love you," because it was just a little bit of an "I love you," it wasn't conceited or anything to believe it. Poor darling, he loved her because he was lonely, and it's great company to have a love in mind. "Yes, it is," she thought.

Trellis passed behind her through the lounge into the narrow hall towards the door.

"I'm out, Trellis!" she called feverishly.

But it was only young Raphael. Young Raphael was one of the family. He came in shyly. He always came in shyly. But that did not stop him talking. . . .

"Oh Raphael!" she vaguely said, with a dim idea of letting him know that she simply could not cope with him and his troubles this afternoon. She had heard about Ysabel Fuller until she could have screamed. She sat down helplessly.

"Happened to see Hilda outside," he said.

Young Raphael always called the grubby old Rolls "Hilda." When one asked him why, he looked mysterious and stroked his little golden beard.

He stood about uncertainly. How elegant he was,

she thought, and nice, romantic in a nice way. Fairy-tale prince. Her eyes rested, were as though soothed by his chains. Young Raphael was always hung with chains. He had a great sense of the delicate value of platinum as a softening influence on the iron laws that govern fashions for men. The only reason why he wore a waistcoat on a warm day was so that he could stretch a tenuous line of platinum across it. Then there was the snaky key-chain flowing luxuriously down over the ridges and valleys of his trouser-pleats into his trousers-pocket. A chap.

She must be going. But she sat on helplessly, wondering why Raphael had come to see her if he wasn't going to talk about himself. He looked courteous and depressed. Whenever young Raphael was trying *not* to talk about himself, or whenever the conversation in any room he happened to be in was not about himself, he always looked courteous and depressed.

She had to smile at him, hanging vaguely about. He was watching her, she thought, with furtive but *enormous* sympathy. She wondered, but very undecidedly, why.

"Well, Raphael?" she said at last.

He stammered, wiping his forehead with a princely linen handkerchief on which was a faint pink smudge of lip-rouge. Perhaps Miss Fuller, she reflected, was being kinder to him. Or perhaps he was consoling himself. Dear Raphael. He said: "Bilgeworthy day . . . just happened to see Hilda outside, and . . ."

"I'm on my way to Lacey Moat," she told him, getting up.

"To Lacey Moat?" He stared at her with round, startled eyes. He had bright blue baby eyes. Easy to hurt, easy to surprise, easy to please. "But you c-can't, Venetia! That *awful* woman!"

She said: "Yes. But father's rattled. . . ."

He was at her shoulder as she went towards the door. He picked up his hat from off the oak-chest in

the narrow hall, a soft black hat it was, and pulled it savagely down over one eyebrow. Then he stared at her with deep sympathy and stammered: "Damn fathers!"

She suddenly put her arms round his neck and sobbed: "Oh Raphael, dear Raphael, damn everything!"

SAVILE was at dinner that evening at Lacey Moat. Vardon did not know it, Serle did not know it, Gore-Cramer did not know it, but Savile was there. He sat, stood, there he was anyhow, on Venetia's plate. He did not say much. She did. She pointed things out to him. She pointed out the logic of her attitude. If he hadn't left so abruptly that afternoon—rude he was, anyhow, love or no love—he would have heard it then. But now he could *see* how right she was. In effect, all she had to say to him was: "So *there,* you see!" And then, from his station on her plate, he looked round the table, and then he looked back at her. Yes, there she was, sitting there verily hemmed in by the facts of her life. "Mess, you see?" she sighed. He agreed, and looked sulky. Such a comfort he was, that Savile. . . .

Upstairs, Harry Gore-Cramer's wife lay very ill. That was why Venetia was at Lacey Moat, would stay there several days, maybe a week. Her father had come to Brook Street that morning and had said, in that consciously stark way of his:

"You'd better come, Venetia. Lend your presence. . . ."

She had come out of her bath in a hurry. The whole household, Trellis, her maid, every one, were always "in a state" when Jasper Vardon, rarely enough, came to Brook Street. She didn't feel quite dry under her dressing-robe. And always when she had had to leave her bath in a hurry and didn't feel quite dry and had

to talk on the telephone or to somebody urgently, she would feel that everything that was said was more than usually unreal, fantastic and just said to provoke one. "Lend your presence" was decidedly one of those. "Miss Vardon lent her presence to the illness of Mrs. Gore-Cramer, who was known to be living in sin with Miss Vardon's father. Mr. Gore-Cramer was also among those present." It wouldn't have sounded reasonable even had she been quite dry.

"Father, 'lend my presence'? What do you mean, dear?"

She was stupid, she ought not to have repeated "lend my presence." He hated being "picked up" on anything he said.

Vardon snapped: "Perhaps I ought to have called in the doctor sooner. But how was I to know? That woman's a devil—she likes pain. . . ."

How she hated that kind of thing, what beastliness it was! Pain was pain. One did *not* like pain unless one was affected or vicious. . . .

He said, in that consciously stark way of his: "All right, I see you don't like the idea. I agree. Please yourself."

He was going.

She said: "Father, it was only that I . . . Anyhow," she said indignantly, "you're not an owner of newspapers, so why do you say 'lend your presence'?"

He said: "Look here, Venetia, this is the only favour I've ever asked of you."

Oh, he had been good! He never interfered, and gave her presents.

He said: "Coming?"

She said: "Of course, father! I'll be there this afternoon."

"You'll stay?"

"Oh, yes!"

That was her life. Typical of her life. She faced that fact. She said to Savile, sitting brooding on her

plate: "Oh Charles, dear Charles, Prince Charles, don't you *see*?" He was silent, as though he knew better. Oh, the amazing, the colossal, the infuriating conceit of men, of good men, bad men, silly men, sour men! The way, in moments when their sense of comfort or of possession, or when *any* sense of theirs was menaced, that deep unassailable conceit would stir in them and call them to retain their peace of mind against the fundamental *silliness* of women. How often she had seen that on Peter's face, that sudden faint smile that topped moments of stress and was a signal to her desperation, telling her that although he had but a moment before been beaten back by the facts of the case, he was now restored to that masculine vigour of mind that could destroy the pale edifice of any woman's facts with the magic manly noise: "Oh, nonsense!"

That conversation with her father had taken place about an hour after Savile had telephoned to ask her to dine with him. Then she had dressed. Then she had thought deeply, very deeply. Then she had written that note to Savile. *All sorts of very odd things seem always to be happening in my life.* What she had meant was: "Oh, keep out of this mess!"

And he had pretended he was going to keep out of it. He had left her that afternoon full of manly rage. But she distrusted manly rage. Manly rage had never, in her experience, stayed for long either as "manly" or as a "rage." He would come back. She didn't know how soon, but he would. Poor lamb, to a closed door. Poor lamb, to a very closed door. . . .

He would come back with an "Oh, nonsense!" face. . . .

But the door would be closed against him. Yes, indeed. Her life was too full already. Her life was already full—of emptiness. How emptiness can cram every corner of a life!

She had heard, naturally, scarcely a word of the

men's talk throughout dinner. There was one good thing, anyhow, about a house permeated with the delicate smell of death, one didn't have to talk and one didn't have to look any happier than one felt, which was a most unusual blessing.

Peter sat at her right. It was one of those round tables that give precedence an air of informality. He, like her, had not been at Lacey Moat for two years. Lacey Moat was nowadays Private. He had come because she was there, to help.

Men had, when it happened to be convenient for them, a vague but large idea of "helping" one. When it wasn't convenient, they put on an "Oh, nonsense!" face. . . .

She had told him that morning over the telephone—she always told him what is known as "everything"—that she was dining with Savile. He had said: "But I thought you hated the sight of the man!" She'd said: "Oh well . . . I suppose one grows up." At that he had used his rare but profound gift for silence. Later he had come to luncheon, as he usually did when he wasn't too busy. She told him that she must, after all, go to Lacey Moat that evening. His voice was consciously undelighted. He had said he would come up, too, for dinner and the night.

"Oh, but why, Peter?"

She particularly didn't want him at Lacey Moat—particularly. Lacey Moat was, for him, full of the sort of memories she wanted him to forget. . . .

And wasn't it true, that a great part of love is memory?

But he insisted on coming.

"It's a beastly household, Venetia. You'll be lonely. . . ."

When it was convenient to them to think that you were lonely—well, you were lonely and that was that. For the rest of the time—most of your life—you could be lonely until you were blue in the face and they

either did not notice it or thought you were being unreasonable.

At dinner Peter was very quiet, almost as silent as she was. His silences were rare, and they always disturbed her. His silences were so young and pitiful and —blameless. Silence somehow assoiled him of arrogance.

But she couldn't, to-night, be much disturbed by him. Her mind was tired with Savile. She couldn't help Peter to-night. She couldn't console, placate, soothe—her pathetic little bag of tricks. And Peter knew that, knew that she was a stranger to him to-night. And he watched her. From the moment he had arrived, just before dinner, he had been examining her in ever so rapid flashes. He had an instinctive sense, she had seen it in him before, of *knowing* when some one was in love with her. And, without saying a word, he would hold a sort of watching-brief for himself: until one day, and still without saying a word, he would suddenly, with an as it were sleight-of-heart, do something to show her how much *he* loved her. . . .

She had often noticed that all the perceptions and intuitions that are commonly called "feminine" were peculiar not at all to the average run of women but to emphatically masculine men like Peter . . . and Savile.

Opposite her sat her father and on her left Harry Gore-Cramer. She avoided, as much as she could, seeing Gore-Cramer. He was a small "nippy"-looking man of any age over thirty. Two blue eyes bulged out of a tight brick-red face. If only there hadn't been a film over the bulging eyes, like a grubby curtain, she had sometimes thought they would have looked curiously pathetic and surprised. Gore-Cramer had been in the Navy, in the House of Commons, in the Divorce and Bankruptcy Courts. He rarely smiled, drank continually and was never drunk. Nobody in the world had ever been able to make even a guess at what thoughts were passing behind those filmy bulging blue eyes.

Her father, tight-lipped, was saying, so sharply that Venetia listened for the first time: "I don't like that, Gore-Cramer. That insinuation."

Venetia, her eyes never off her plate, could feel Peter glance sharply aside from his thoughts to her father and Gore-Cramer. Peter had an affectionate, contemptuous loyalty to her father. They were both, she could acutely feel, fixing their eyes on little Gore-Cramer, driving him back into his musty little hole. She wondered what *could* be passing behind those filmy eyes that just missed looking pathetic and surprised. He seemed to be engrossed in the act of twiddling a half-empty champagne-glass between the thumb and the first finger of his right hand.

"No," he said.

She had once heard that voice on the telephone, and it had struck her like a voice coming through a thick layer of dust and straw.

"No what?" Vardon snapped, fixing his eyes on the tight absorbed little figure.

Serle said: "Jasper, we can go into this later." His voice was curiously soothing to Venetia. Other people found it harsh and arrogant, but she had long ago ceased to hear the surface of his voice.

"I meant," said Gore-Cramer, engrossed in his twiddling, "that I wouldn't like it either if I were in your position."

Jasper Vardon lit a long cigar. When lighting a cigar, during no matter how emphatic a moment, his pale eyes would always become thoughtful, remote, as though he was momentarily abstracted from his immediate surroundings.

"Go on," he said.

Venetia suddenly rose, saying: "Wait, I'm going."

Vardon said: "What's that, Venetia?"

Venetia said: "Hold your tongues a moment, would you mind, until I am out of the room."

They seemed to dwindle, men into mice. In stillness,

in silence, men into mice. One had only to be firm in contempt and they were nothing. . . .

Swiftly, steadily, she walked to the door. Mice, mice. All of them, always, mice trying to be pirates. Lechers, financiers, statesmen, great men, fathers, lovers . . . mice, full of craft, scampering away if you just looked at them, stinking with fear and wonder. As she reached the door she saw reflected in the glass frame of a Landseer—Lacey Moat was like that—Peter turned towards her back, half-risen in his chair, his face staring, dark, as though he had just seen the corner of a secret and could make out no more of it. And suddenly she saw, not only a corner, but the whole secret—that it was not she but the *Savile in her* that had left the table with such contempt—that the Savile who had stormily left her that afternoon was now making her repeat the contemptuous gesture. She opened the door unhurriedly, yet she was torn with wonder and terror, as though a beast was at her back and an angry sea at her feet. And it seemed to her that her heart was a thing of pillars and that love was a shadow quickened by terror and astonishment trying to escape from among the brooding pillars of her heart. And she thought: "I will let it escape. It is not good enough." And at that moment, as though drawing courage from her vanishing figure, Vardon's voice said:

"Go on, Gore-Cramer. What's my position?"

There was a husky mumble, a voice swathed in dust and straw.

"What?" shouted Vardon.

Venetia, collapsing from her high disdain, frantically slammed the door behind her and stood resting against it, her heart beating. The lights were not yet on in the hall, the front doors were wide open to the twilit garden. In the gloom at the foot of the stairway an elderly nurse was looking at her curiously.

"Miss Vardon?" the nurse said.

ABOUT two years before these happenings Jasper Vardon had taken to himself a mistress. He was then fifty-four years old, and a good life.

She was a willowy woman with a very small head on a thick white throat. She had round staring brown eyes. They shone in the darkness. Her skin was as white as a bone lying in sand. Her hands were short and plump and very white, and her figure was like a Toledo blade in a sheath, you felt that beneath that thick white skin was an indolent thing, supple and tempered and very dangerous. She had bright hair. She was a Jewess.

Her husband, Gore-Cramer, was a strange man. The woman Janice was his second wife. The first had divorced him in despair of being loved by him. Unattractive as he was, with those eyes, that tight little brick-red face, that "nippy"-looking little figure, that voice swathed in dust and straw, he had, to the amazement of all men and the resentment of most women, been exceedingly loved. He had inspired passion and fidelity. The hidden craft of some men is a miracle to most men. No woman ever forgot Gore-Cramer. His second wife, Janice, a most forgetful woman, was very far from forgetting him. That infuriated Jasper Vardon. Between husband and wife, he found, was a dim but unalterable sympathy. O sympathy, O most beautiful word, how hast thou fallen!

Vardon was powerless to break this bond. The woman Janice lived with him at Lacey Moat, but Gore-Cramer would sometimes visit her. She fascinated men into abjection as only stupid women can. Men sacrificed their manhood on those pale burning altars. She made men disgusted with themselves, but while she stayed with one he could not see nor admit any alternative to her. And she left holes in men's lives which the women who came after her had carefully to

walk round and pretend to ignore. There was nothing at all subtle about her. She was a silly woman and she had a high silly voice and a silly staccato laugh. Yet her husband was her servant, and Vardon fell in love with her as though love was a bottomless pit. She must have loved him. But she was so indolent. She laughed instead of talking, and like Spanish women she did not mind getting fat. She spent all her time lying on cushions and eating peaches, grapes, and *marrons glacés*.

Vardon and his woman lived at Lacey Moat a life secluded, unapproachable. They were "out" to every one. Venetia had never met the woman, never seen her. Gore-Cramer was the only visitor at Lacey Moat. He would come to luncheon on Sundays. Vardon would, maybe, lend him money. Then after luncheon he would hang about, his hands in his pockets, "nippy" looking. He would pace about the garden, looking into the distance and smoking one after another of Vardon's cigars. Maybe he was thinking of horses or that he would like a drink, or maybe he was thinking of a "nice little girl" somewhere. Every now and then he would take one hand from his pocket and, his eyes on the distance, pass the open palm down his tight little paunch. Sometimes on a Sunday afternoon the woman Janice would say to Vardon: "I want to be alone with Gore-Cramer." These things made him feel a jest before his servants. At first he would not give way to Gore-Cramer, he made violent scenes. But she never argued. In the end she would deprive him of speech by a look of blank indifference that, washing like a sluggish wave over those round staring brown eyes, also washed him away into the limbo of her forgotten passions. That he could not bear, the possibility of losing not his passion for her but her passion for him. That was how the woman Janice held men. She was a woman who, loitering blankly under a burden of jewels into a restaurant, would extract from women the almost

passionate question: "But what can men *see* in her? That voice, that laugh, that *blah* expression!" Men always answer such questions by taking an experienced but contemptuous attitude towards their fellow-men, which is irritating to the women who put such questions and who want to hear something contemptuous about the woman.

Hers was that vitality that can resist every inducement to arise and walk. She was old-fashioned on Babylonian lines. She lived as though life were a perfumed coffin hung with tapestries of the chase of women by men. She lived as though to prove the verity of the warning that in the midst of life we are in death. And when one day she fell ill she but slightly commented on it, saying: "I have always been ill, what does it matter?" And as her body withered with the illness she would every now and then laugh her silly staccato laugh. But it went badly for this woman in the end, for God saw to it.

Maybe the way she fascinated Jasper Vardon into abjection had something to do with the fascination that his own state of abjection, in a man so long accustomed to being "strong" about women, had for himself. In men of Vardon's type, those who are commonly called "strong" and "dominating" and the like, there is sometimes what can only be described as an inverted vanity in the discovery in themselves of a fatal weakness. There is nothing quite like the self-satisfied pride audible in the voice of a bully who is confessing: "Oh, *she's* got me all right!" In a similar way it has been remarked that in refined and sensitive men who have joined themselves to viragoes there sometimes seems to be an inverted breeding that induces in them something very like satisfaction at the constant humiliations that are heaped upon them. It is true that nothing brings out a man's good qualities so much as the cross he has to bear, but it is a strong indictment of the virtues of resignation that nothing brings out the worst side of

a man so much as a growing enjoyment of the fact of having a cross to bear.

Loaded always with pearls that seemed to cling about her high round breasts as though they knew that they were the only children thereof: her legs, always coiled on cushions, ever so delicately aspiring from the girlish slenderness of her ankles to the lush maturity of her rounded knees, above which as she lay coiled was always just visible the staring whiteness of her flesh: the woman Janice languished from indolence into illness without sigh or plaint. "Pain?" she said. "I've never been but one big pain, anyway."

And with her weakness there grew, like a flame devouring the withering white body, a passion to enjoy, to enjoy indescribably. Perplexed, scared, Vardon tried to call in doctors. Lying in his arms, laughing her silly laugh into his face, burning his body, she would say: "Could I be like *this* if I were really ill!" And she forbade him to call a doctor. And with her weakness her power over him grew darker and deeper, and he could deny her nothing. Old Townleigh, watching from afar, his earthy wisdom never at a loss for a reason for earthy passions, once said to Serle with an air of envy that made the younger man burst out laughing: "By God, there must be something to a man of Vardon's age who can satisfy a girl like that!" And that was what Jasper Vardon thought, too.

One Sunday, an unprecedented thing happened at Lacey Moat. Harry Gore-Cramer brought a friend with him. Vardon was speechless with astonishment. The woman Janice burst out laughing, and when Gore-Cramer casually introduced his lanky grey friend as Dr. Frakes she became almost hysterical with laughter.

Vardon caught Gore-Cramer's arm and said: "What does this mean?" Vardon was one of those men who search for the eyes of the person they are addressing and are conscious of the strength of their own characters. What they never realise is the strength of other

people's, who use their eyes more for reflection than for argument.

Gore-Cramer disengaged his arm and walked towards the windows. How it rained that day! He said something casually over his shoulder, but the words were drowned in the woman Janice's helpless laughter. Suddenly she stopped laughing.

"What?" said Vardon, angry with himself for being somehow unable, in that sudden silence, to shout the word.

Gore-Cramer stood drumming the fingers of one hand against the weeping window. "It's my opinion," he said, "that Janice is very ill. And if you weren't such a blind and selfish ass . . ."

Dr. Frakes, his back to the two men, was talking to the woman Janice, inclining his lanky frame over the wide divan on which she lay coiled as no completely English woman could ever lie. Dressed always in black, she loved to lie on brilliant colours, her high insteps curved like snakes' heads on bright cushions. Flakes of cigarette-ash trembled on her long amber legs. Her arms were naked to the armpits and white as powdered sugar. She stretched them up, up, to her bright hair, and her large red mouth laughed up at Dr. Frakes. The great pearls looked grey against the distended thick white throat.

"Pain?" she said up to him. "Oh, agony, perfect agony!"

Vardon said: "Look here, Gore-Cramer, you know as well as I do that she's been telling me for weeks that she's not really ill——"

Gore-Cramer said: "You fool, she's killing herself."

Then Vardon swung violently round at the silly staccato laugh. "What the devil's there to laugh at that?"

"That man Gore-Cramer!" she managed to say weakly. "Haven't you ever noticed his eyes? Whenever he looks at you he looks as dangerous as an oyster in May."

Vardon, with an effort, turned to the lanky doctor. "What's the matter, doctor?"

Dr. Frakes appeared to experience some difficulty in distinguishing Vardon from the furniture. He said vaguely: "Of course, I must make an examination. . . ."

The woman Janice pulled a face, sighed, and rose from the divan, saying: "What nonsense it is! As though one didn't know without an examination. . . ."

Vardon said: "Janice, what—is—the—matter?"

Dr. Frakes held the door open for her. Then, as she delayed, he went out of the room. From the door she laughed back at Vardon's bewildered, angry face. Very seldom was she to be seen standing, and notable she looked, the way she stood with her arms straight down at her sides and her bright head held high and the Velasquez shadows about her eyes and high thin nose. A thoroughbred Jewess, like those of Spain we read of. She had no poses, she didn't give a damn for poses and fashions, she dressed as it pleased her, in long, long black dresses, sleeveless and shaped, pronouncing her high round breasts and her tender hips and her long soft thighs. And very tall she looked in her long black dresses with her very small head on her thick white throat. And soft and supple beyond all seemliness.

"Oh Jasper!" she said. "Oh Jasper!" And she laughed her silly staccato laugh, as though not a funnier object was there in the world than he. And his ceaseless hunger for her rose to his lips in a storm of bewilderment, but she quickly raised a finger to her lips and said as though to a child: "Ssh, be quiet, Jasper, it's nothing at all. I'm only living up to my reputation as a malignant growth in modern society."

VENETIA felt herself growing hot at the impersonal but quite obvious comment of the nurse's eyes on her idiotically confused exit from the dining-room. She was a tall stout woman with a heavy handsome governing-classes face. Had she given but a flicker of a smile, Venetia would have loved her.

"Miss Vardon?" the nurse said.

Venetia made that faintly dubious noise that inevitably serves almost every Anglo-Saxon as a response to the definite question as to whether one's name is So-and-So.

"Mrs. Gore-Cramer," the nurse said, "has been asking for you. She would like to see you."

Venetia was dumbfounded. "She would like to see *me*!"

"Some hours ago she heard from Mr. Vardon that you were coming, and although she said nothing at the time she has just now been asking for you—particularly."

Venetia said: "Oh . . ."

"She is very weak, but quite conscious. Unusually conscious."

"She's not in pain?"

"She has been given something. . . ."

"And when is the operation?"

"Mr. Black seemed undecided, Miss Vardon. He has not said so, but I gather that he really considers it useless to operate. He will be here first thing in the morning."

Outside, framed in the wide open doorway, the last swallows curved in the dusk and the trees swung upwards into the shadows of their leaves, as pillars in great churches mount to the high deep shadows of the nave. The nurse, having delivered her message, was turning away: not, to Venetia's consternation, back up the stairway but across the shadowed hall towards the

garden. What completely satisfying pride certain people take in delivering a message, from some one of whom they disapprove to some one of whom they also disapprove, without adding so much as one grain of their own humanity! Thus do they disassociate themselves from the needs of troubled people, as who should say: "Thank God we are not as they are!" And it is very true that they are not.

Venetia, to the nurse's dire back now black against the twilight, said helplessly: "But aren't you the . . . aren't you the night-nurse?"

"I thought that as you were going upstairs to sit with her for a little while I would take a breath of fresh air."

The nurse marched into the soft mystery of the dusky garden where the trees stood darkly watching, waiting, their heads like mad black castles against the deepening night. Venetia stood waiting too, she had not an idea for what. It seemed to her that it was impossible for her to move until she had settled something, but she could not remember what that something was. It was very hot, a stifling night. Presently it would rain and the air would be delicious with earthy fragrance. One by one the trees stole away into the darkness. Through the dining-room door she could dimly hear men's voices, Peter's voice, sharp but curiously soothing. He knew something she did not know, he never let things manhandle him. . . .

Oh, but he did, he too! He let her manhandle him, he suffered. Black Petah, dear Black Petah, why are we where we are, how did we come to be where we are, what has happened to make you so dark and hungry and angry and me so unfeeling, why is your tenderness so watchful and mine so guarded, in what awful secret place do we weave the webs that entangle our hearts, why aren't we friends, my dear one, friends and *separate* people instead of being locked-up together in a dim place where we are at the mercy of secret leaping

antagonisms of which each of us is so ashamed that we have to save our faces before each other by insisting on our "love"?

She went up towards the faint wash of light on the first landing. She did not even know in what room the sick woman lay. She could ring and ask some one. The servants at Lacey Moat were all strangers to her, she was a stranger in the house. That word "stranger," it was full of silence and unrest. And never once did the question cease throbbing in her: "*Why* does she want to see me, how dare she want to see me?" For suffering and pity were the most secret of all pains. Suffering and pity were laid up privily in a corner of oneself and they were guarded by oneself as a good nurse watches over hurt children who have promised not to weep. The fat and prejudiced sympathy for "suffering" which, raised now to a fine pitch of noisy perfection by Napoleonic minds that had grasped the "news-value" of sympathy and the "publicity-value" of compassion, was being daily carried on large damp slabs from the offices of great newspapers and the great hearts of popular novelists to an eagerly-waiting public, had brought pity and understanding "within the reach of all" . . . and had hardened the distaste of *private* people for being of those who, themselves unpurified by suffering, complacently think of themselves as "trying to do their best" for their fellow human beings. What conceited use people made of the word "suffering," how ready they were to think that they had "suffered," how glibly—and oh, proudly!—they would exalt the trivial agitations that have possessed them with words so lofty in the abyss of self-knowledge as "ordeal" and "suffering"! Venetia had always been astonished by women of her acquaintance who, with the most convinced air possible, would exalt their trifling agitations—the infidelity of husbands whom they had not truly loved, the disobedience of children whom they had conventionally "cared for," the

treachery of friends to whom they had been conventionally loyal, the loss of money which they had never spent but selfishly—how they would readily ride on the vapours of these distresses to the august realm of pain and come actually to pride themselves on the fact that by virtue of their "sufferings" they were given insight to the woes of others.

By an instinct she didn't question she went directly to the door of the bedroom that had been hers until her last visit to Lacey Moat more than two years ago. With her hand on the door-knob she listened to the silence of the house. You know those sudden moments when silence enters the body and sits there and sings a song in praise of nothing? You know the divine sickness of being suddenly possessed by a knowledge so profound that the mind has not words with which to define it to itself? You know the silence in which you crawl like a worm in the womb of time? You know the silence in which you see yourself as a sleeping figure with a wooden face and you wonder: "What is that doing there, what does it mean, where does it come from, what is the actual meaning of being alive?" You know the silence in which you suddenly realise that you are *dreaming* yourself, that your life, your body, your everything, is just a dream that you are dreaming? You know the silence in which you suddenly realise that everything that is happening to you has happened to you before somewhere, sometime, in another life?

Very softly she went into the room. It was so dim and quiet in there, as though the room was asleep and was dreaming that a lamp was alight in it. The air was light and clean with *eau de Cologne*. She did not recognise her old room. She had first read *The Brushwood Boy* and *Kipps* in this room. Now it too had grown up, grown old. In two years her room had lived a lifetime. Draped in dreadful secrets, it was remote from her. The pieces of lacquer had retreated into their own shadows. Everything in the room was soft

and smudged, it was as though an angel had passed by and had thoughtlessly put his thumb on the room, smudging it all, depriving each thing in the room of even any desire to be itself, the red lacquer, the jade, the fat goldfish in their bowl, the green and scarlet cushions with their tassels of gold and the golden cushions with their tassels of crimson cord.

Venetia did not look towards the vast shadow of the bed. She was a watcher in the room, that was all, she would take no risk by word or glance of disturbing the sick woman's rest. In spite of the friendly *eau de Cologne* the room weighed on her like a heavy perfume. Her skin was uncomfortable, as though it did not fit her. What incredible things had happened to her in this room in the old, old days, what miseries and melancholies! What an invention of torment, what a pitfall for the pitiful, was this thing called "love"!

"I love you, and you love me."

"Oh, it's wonderful, what happiness!"

"Yes, but you love me like this whereas I love you like that, and the two loves are not equal at all, and it's not fair, it's cruel."

"But listen, darling, it's all *right,* my love and your love will meet if you will only give them half a chance, and when they have met they will come to an understanding and then we will adjust ourselves to each other, and what is love but a will to adjustment?"

"No, no, that won't do at all, you're quibbling, at first you were quite different, you used to love me much more, but now because you don't love me as I love you you are eating into my nerves and I am so tormented that I must torment you. . . ."

Had that thing that had first come to her in this room, that thing wrapped in fear and bewilderment and pity and weariness, had that been love—or what? One's mind reasonable and "businesslike" with—well, with pity—oh, that maddening word "pity"!—one had decided to act for the best. And yet, in spite of

oneself, in spite of one's reasonableness, terror sat like a witch in one's heart and one's bones kept on beating at one's mind with wearisome questions as to the *reality* of what was happening—to him, to her—was that love? How stupid people were to talk of lust and wickedness and seduction! One tried not to do harm, one tried to act for the best, one preferred very much to make somebody contented, happy, one did things with eyes open and mind arranged in such and such a way and prepared for such and such a step . . . how tiring that sort of thinking was! . . . and in the end one followed a line of action, passive action, that seemed to one the best in the circumstances.

"I am a *most* unselfish person!" Venetia suddenly thought, and her heart bled for herself.

The curtains were not drawn across the bow-windows. Her bow-windows. How the night stared into the room, dark and still, looking like all the ages of melancholy and asking "Why?" with a hot breath. Walking warily towards the window-seat she caught a glimpse of herself in a cheval glass. She thought: "That is me. But what is me? In what way is me different from anybody else, what purpose does me serve, what *good* is me?" It seemed to her that that question started a brave career for itself by ringing through the world but could not keep up its reputation as a question and collapsed to the ground and lived happily ever after as a speck of dust on a blade of grass. She stared at herself in the mirror as though she were somebody else, and thought: "Yes, one would call that a beautiful person. She has personal Advantages. Much good they have done her. But is that absolutely *her* fault?" She could not answer that question either. She noticed with vague surprise that she had not changed her dress since her arrival, that the gardenia was still at her shoulder. She sniffed at it. The wise and sinful smell of gardenias. Then she gave a gasp and her heart missed a beat, two beats, three beats. Behind

her in the looking-glass, far down in the depths of the darkly shining pool, two eyes were shining, staring.

A voice said: "Are you Venetia?"

Venetia whispered: "Yes."

The voice said: "There was a bat in here a moment ago."

Venetia thought: "I *knew* there was a funny smell!" She turned blindly towards the vast shape of the bed and heard herself fumbling idiotically with the words: "I'm sure there isn't one here now. It must have found its way out."

The voice said: "Yes. That blasted nurse with the Wimbledon face always leaves the windows open. I keep on telling her to keep them closed, but the idiot thinks I'm delirious. God, how some English-women infuriate one with their 'fresh air' here and their 'fresh air' there—and then they don't wash themselves properly! You might shut those windows, will you? All of them."

"But," Venetia tried to protest, "you must have *some* air!"

The voice said: "I don't want any air! I hate air! For God's *sake* forget the White Man's Burden and close the windows!"

Then the voice said: "Sit here—here!"

There was a great arm-chair drawn close to the bed. It looked like a black bath with one end down, and Venetia sank into it with the feeling that she would never, never stop sinking. And oh, she didn't stop for a long time. Thence, deep down in the lap of luxury, she could see no more than the head on the pillows. The vast expanse of the bed was above her, lost in the mists of distance. There was a bedspread of chinchilla over it. "This, ladies and gentlemen, is the battlefield. You cannot, unfortunately, see all of it, but what you can see is surely significant of the ferocity of the repeated engagements of Lacey Moat. . . ." Venetia shrieked at herself: "Stop, stop, stop!"

"Venetia!"

"Yes?"

"This used to be your room, didn't it?"

"Yes, Janice."

"I've changed it a lot, haven't I? I suppose you hate it now. I suppose you hate red lacquer in bedrooms. . . ."

Venetia found she had nothing at all to say against red lacquer in bedrooms except that it was Obvious, and if there was one thing that made Venetia want to commit murder it was when Clever Boys and Clever Girls condemned something by saying that it was Obvious. . . .

Janice said: "Don't mind me. Nothing can be gained by concealing the fact that I've a cheap showy taste in decoration. But I always do what pleases me, and that's a great thing, isn't it? Did you mind much, Venetia, when you had to leave this room and Lacey Moat?"

"It's such a long time ago, Janice! I'm not sure. . . ."

"Oh, of course you're sure! What nonsense you talk, my *darling*! Come, tell me."

"Well, I think I did mind. Yes, of course I did. But I'm sure I didn't mind so much as all that. For one thing, Janice, I had been very unhappy here——"

"Oh, I know, I know! Every one is unhappy everywhere, every one's stupid, that's all it is. Look at me, I'm happy. Go on, go on!"

"And for another thing, you see, I've got a great fault, my sense of possession is very weak, I never feel I really own anything——"

"There you are, I knew you were stupid! She says 'My sense of possession is very weak' and 'I never feel I really own anything'! What could be more stupid than that? It's just asking for trouble, my *darling*! You know, I'm really very sorry for any woman who hasn't got some drop of Jewish blood in

her somewhere. If your sense of possession is weak then of course people take advantage of that to possess *you* for their own silly purposes. Now aren't I right, don't they?"

"Yes, they do," Venetia said miserably.

"Of course they do! And that's no fun for you, is it?"

"What it comes to is this, Janice, that there's a lot of grabbing going on in this world *all* the time and some people are born to grab while others are born to be grabbed. And I'm what's called 'the latter.'"

"No, you're just stupid, that's all it is. Oh, yes, I know that every one thinks I'm stupid too and just a tart, but as a matter of fact I think a great deal. . . ."

"Janice, you're *talking* a great deal! You mustn't talk." At last, anyhow, she had said the right thing. How often when she had been ill had people marched in to see her, cheerfully plumped themselves down into the most comfortable chair, and had said heartily: "Now you mustn't talk. Look, here are some flowers I've brought you." Flowers, when one wanted to talk!

Then the voice whispered: "I never thought you'd come."

Venetia wanted to say, "And I thought I didn't want to," but she felt that if she even began to say that she would break down and cry and cry and cry.

In that light the bright hair on the pillow looked washed in purple and the eyes in the withered white face were so black, soft and shining. They didn't look like sick eyes, there was no pain in them, there was something else, something that terrified Venetia, something that seemed to stir in the soft depths of those eyes like a strange unheard-of flower in the depths of a dark pool.

"Janice, are you laughing?"

"No, praying. But perhaps that's the same thing as laughing, for laughing generally gets one what one wants. Would you like to hear my prayer? It's not a

bit stupid. I'm forgiving God his sins—being one of them."

Venetia stared at Janice's mouth, curved and red and sad. It seemed to her most important to kiss Janice on the mouth, but the more she thought of it the shyer she became, and it seemed such a business to embark on, she so low in her chair and Janice miles away up there.

"Oh Janice, what nonsense you talk!"

"Yes, I know. But I amuse myself, and that's the main thing, isn't it?"

"And," Venetia went on, "there's no nonsense that sounds so convincing as that which we all talk when we feel that some one dislikes us and we want to satisfy our vanity by 'registering' our dislike first."

"Oh clever girl!" Janice laughed dimly. "Kiss me."

And when Venetia had kissed her a great calm descended upon her. She stayed kneeling beside the bed. *What* a novel she could write, she thought. The shapes of great thoughts stalked about her tranquillity. But only the shapes.

"Venetia!"

"Yes, dear?"

"Is it true what they say, that you are Peter Serle's mistress?"

"Oh Janice, what does that matter now?"

"That's true, too. What *does* that matter? Oh, how clever you are, my *darling*! But you must go further with that question else it's just stupid and means nothing. You must say to yourself: 'What does it matter what we *do*? What matters is what we are.' And as nobody knows what we are except ourselves—and we only know when we're asleep—the point is to be left alone and not bothered by a lot of stupid criticisms."

On the bedspread of chinchilla Janice's hand lay like a white willow-leaf. Venetia rested her cheek against it, and a long time passed.

"You're crying, Venetia! Don't cry, darling, what's the use of crying? I haven't cried for years. I think the last time was when I saw *The Birth of a Nation.* How I cried at that, and afterwards for quite a long time I felt superior to other people as though I understood something which they were too hard to understand."

Venetia's tears fell on to the wasted hand. She did not know, she tried to think but could not decide, whether she was crying because she was sorry or because she was glad. There was love in her tears, that was all she knew, an immense love that stretched far beyond the frontiers of personal and describable love, a love that was like a dark and beautiful river sweeping over the jagged rocks of life and death and embracing in its song the futility of the universe. It seemed somehow a beautiful futility. . . .

Far away beyond her, in the shapeless realities by the door, there was a careful sound.

"I must go, Janice."

"Yes. Good-bye, Venetia."

As she walked swiftly out of the room, her mind as blank as a sheet of paper on which one word is written, the elderly nurse said to her with professional gentleness: "Don't be alarmed if you hear her crying out towards morning. The morphia she's had will be wearing off soon and I am not to give her any more until the doctor comes."

She walked swiftly outdoors. The night was black and hot. On the lawn she would have bumped into Peter but for the suddenly perceived glow of his cigar.

"Oh, Black Petah!"

She had not called him by that name since that night a century ago when he had come into that bedroom in which Janice now lay and had said: "I can't stand this any longer, Venetia, life is impossible like this."

He said now: "Venetia! Where are you off to in such a hurry?"

"For a walk. . . ."

"It's going to rain, I think."

"Oh, thank God!"

"I'll come with you, unless you want to be alone. . . ."

Ah, that new humility, the humility that came with uncertainty about her! How pitiable, how shameful, how heartrending it was! She must get him out of that, she could not allow him to be like *that*. . . .

"Come on, Petah, come on, and let's get very wet!"

And as he took her arm and walked beside her she thought: "Anyhow he is mine, he loves me, he is mine!" And she had comfort in him because he was hers, and she thought to herself, "This is love," and that night she astonished him, and he, being a man, was not humble any more, saying: "I didn't know, how was I to know, that you still loved me so much!"

When she awoke the next morning she felt safe from Savile. . . .

BOOK FOUR

OW Lord Townleigh was sixty-two years old, and his power was as a great tree with ever-spreading branches, and his power was as a dragon in the land of England, flying here and leaping there with wondrous agility, protecting the rich with monstrous belchings of fire and smoke, menacing corruption and crushing disorder with roars of righteous wrath that set knaves trembling piteously, and making divers other commotions of a lofty and public-spirited nature that set the whole world marvelling. In very truth this man's achievement was colossal. Of him Serle, whose pitiless logic spared not friend nor foe, and who sometimes would, for sheer love of trouble, hold a proud and lawless light to the dingy darkness of party politics, once said in the House of Commons:

"There is a certain noble lord whose infrequent appearances in another place are not to be taken as a sign of his failing interest in the high art of government. There are weighty reasons for his obscurity in the august assembly of the peers. Moreover, it has often been remarked that imperious men revolt from the uncertain hazards of debate, and that conquerors can dispense even with the necessity for human speech. For we are daring to speak of a conqueror the like of whom this world has hitherto never seen. He has done what Cæsar most imperfectly did, what Napoleon disastrously failed to do. He has conquered England. Napoleon could not master a nation of shopkeepers. Lord Townleigh has mastered a nation of men—he has changed them into newspaper-readers."

None the less, Lord Townleigh was a man of culture. He rejoiced in conversation after dinner. Contemptuous of the enervating wit of polite society, he had pleasure only in the rude but fearless minds of men of science and letters. Resplendent with honours, he sought the sober garment of knowledge.

He discovered to his surprised friends a profound respect for the humanities, a singular knowledge of comparative religions, and was wont to expound the teachings of Plato to the youthful novelists who sought his table and his patronage. He radiated the charming and innocent gaiety of the *savant*. Practising Jew though he was, and a proud light of Jewry, he was yet versed in the lore of the most practical of saints, which is Jesus Christ, and exhorted his editorial-writers to write in praise of Our Lord. They did, and the circulation of his newspapers multiplied exceedingly, so that my Lords Rothermere, Beaverbrook, Burnham, and Riddell had to look to it.

He had read the lives of the Cæsars. Ripe with the benevolence of age, and yearning for salvation, he turned his back on the furious egotisms of Napoleon and Northcliffe and followed the example of the divine Augustus, of whom it was said: "In his old age he softened towards the world."

But God will not long suffer our arrogant complacency, and our comfort provokes His wrath. Grass grows where Babylon stood. Rome fell. It cannot be fairly said that Lord Townleigh fell. But he certainly declined, in so far as his tranquillity fled before the fiery lances of desire. For presently the innocent pleasures of the *savant* were withered before the heartless sarcasm of destiny.

In short, the time came when Lord Townleigh's mind was troubled with disorder and his heart possessed of envy. The example of his old friend Jasper Vardon burned within him, and the woman Janice was as a lovely mirage in the desert of his success and solitude.

Vardon had cheated the barren pleasures of his middle years by winning the love of a woman young, beautiful, and desirous. Why should not Jerry Townleigh do the same?

And he looked around him, and he saw that women were beautiful. And he was afraid. All his life he had been afraid. Not even his most intimate friends knew that all his life that vain and violent and earth-bound man had been afraid of the beauty of women, lest he should be enmeshed thereby and entangled therein and his strength be turned to water within him.

But no man can be a coward unto himself for long. Presently he will find a reason for his cowardice, and presently that reason will glorify itself into an idea and will shine with pride like an ideal. Thus young Jerry Sass's fear of the beauty of women, lest he should grow besotted thereby, took with the increasing years the high colour of strong purpose, and Lord Townleigh could say with sincerity: "The woman has not been made, my friend, who can get a hold over old Jerry."

But now he was sixty-two years old and the example of Jasper Vardon and his woman was hot within him, and darts of envy pricked his potent detachment so that he was as a deflated bladder to himself. It was not the rage of the flesh that exasperated his dominating spirit, it was not lust that wrestled with him in the darkness, and the devil that tempted Saint Anthony was made to look a fool before the proud and boisterous eyes of my Lord Townleigh. It was competition that inflamed him.

How often his newspapers had written: "Competition is the keynote of modern civilisation, the cornerstone of modern progress." Competition, alas, was here the keynote, cornerstone, and only begetter. Competition begat desire. Competition always does. No longer could the government of men distract old Townleigh's mind. He trod the lonely path of envy, he stumbled through the valley of discontent, and he sat

alone in the cave that is paved with gold and adorned with the insignia of power.

Bemused with thoughts of human sympathy, he aspired to the gaieties of the heart. The devil, who had not been made to look a fool for nothing, tempted him with subtle temptations. Lord Townleigh could not withstand him. From Christ he descended to Fragonard. He dreamed of love. He thought of love as a companion delicious and delicate, tender and witty. He sought romance. A little child could have led him. Alas, he did not go to Kensington Gardens. He went to the Embassy Club, and over Ciro's he cast his eyes. He asked Ysabel Fuller to dine with him. He gave her platinum and diamonds. He asked her to sup with him. He gave her pearls. He made her famous in his newspapers. Miss Fuller was flattered and amused. Who shall blame her?

But it is well known that the leopard cannot change his spots, and that the lion is a shy beast. It was not in old Townleigh's nature to be with women *un homme sérieux*. He could not so betray his dominating spirit as to desire Ysabel with conviction. There never left him his majestic cowardice of carnal delights, and his egotism revolted from the sweets of love. Never could he so forget himself as to deliver himself or any part of himself over to any human being.

Nevertheless, he persisted in wooing the beautiful lady. The company of men had been the breath of his life, but now he was possessed by a desire for a lovely woman to surrender herself to him. His life was uncrowned until a woman's love should crown it. And why should not he, Jerry Townleigh, achieve what other men had? Why should not he be loved? Serle was loved by the beautiful Venetia, Vardon by the desirous Janice. Was he, then, offensive to women? The thought was naturally intolerable to him, and he showered Miss Fuller with attentions. But it all meant absolutely *nothing*.

That, more or less, was our friend Mr. Messenger's analysis of old Townleigh's present condition. He sketched the same with a degree of enjoyment that would have been unseemly but for an alloy of pity, and gave it at some length not for any conceit he had in his own interpretation but the more thoroughly to arm young Raphael against the insidious disorders of envy, malice, lust, and filial disobedience. However, he did not succeed. Young Raphael had his own ideas, and could find no measure of relief but in stating them.

He had come to see Mr. Messenger late one afternoon. Mr. Messenger lived in what is called, with a fine disregard for the attractions of the rest of the world, a "central position," in two rooms above a stable in a mews near Hertford Street in Mayfair. The place was called Ducking Pond Mews, and its odour of poverty and horses was doubtless pleasing to that gentle man. A study of ancient books shows us that the sanctity of men is not infrequently to be measured by the odours that surround them.

One climbed, in the almost total darkness at the far end of the stable, to Mr. Messenger's "flat" up a narrow flight of iron steps. His rooms were dark, damp, low, and incredibly untidy. There was a place called the "bathroom." Mount Wyroc once said of his penniless and incomprehensible cousin-german, "He lives in damp but gentlemanly confusion. He wants nothing. He shall be rewarded, for he has turned his back on Fortnum & Mason."

The door at the head of the iron stairway was always wide open, and his friends walked in as they pleased into the Messenger establishment. He was lying down when young Raphael peered into the sitting-room. The two small dusty windows were as wide open as they could be forced to the square yard that rejoiced in the name of Ducking Pond Mews and that stank with the wisdom and wickedness of London. Over the encircling rooms the eye could trace against the veiled sky the

ever-increasing adornments to London's vanity, the palaces and hotels and public-buildings with which the hoary city is even now trying to accommodate its old and sinful majesty to present conditions. Alas, where is Regent Street, where the domain of Devonshire House, where the friendly little god that flew amid the embosoming flowers of the flower-women in Piccadilly Circus?

Mr. Messenger was pale, and two red splashes sat brightly on his cheek-bones, but he smiled with pleasure at seeing young Raphael. Over him as he lay was thrown what at first looked like a very soiled grey rug, but closer examination would show that its present miserable condition was not without memories of a glorious past in the military history of England as a high-waisted silk-lined surcoat of an ensign of His Majesty's Guards. Every now and then, for some days at a time, Mr. Messenger would be unwillingly constrained to do his newspaper work at home. He had a cough. When he coughed he would sit up and bend forward so that his forehead almost touched his knees, and there would be a large bandana handkerchief held to his mouth. When he had finished coughing he would quickly hide the handkerchief under the *ci-devant* coat.

Young Raphael sat himself down cross-legged by his friend's feet on the mattress that served the establishment as a sofa. He was more nervous even than usual, smoking many cigarettes, but it was obvious that he was trying his best to look calm and be quiet. Young Raphael always tried hard to allow a decent interval to elapse between entering a room and beginning to talk about himself. And during that interval he would look courteous and depressed, as though his thoughts were flowing between banks of weeping willows in the dusk. . . .

Suddenly, however, the gentle fluttering eyes filled with tears and he stammered:

"They're punishing me all right. . . ."

"Punishing you, Raphael? Who?"

Raphael tried to look self-possessed, thoughtful, reasonable, gravely passing his long white fingers through that tiny golden beard.

"Of course," he said reasonably, "it's not at all unnatural. I see that. . . ."

"Raphael, do come to the point!"

"Yes, but it's difficult!" the boy stammered. "For instance, it's easy to imagine why and how Ysabel told him about that diamond. I deserved that. Anyhow, what's a diamond! And she didn't tell him that out of spite against me but because she thought it would annoy Mr. Savile——"

"How do you know that, Raphael?"

"She told me. That's how she is with me sometimes, she tells me just how beastly she's been and why—and then next day she'll do the same sort of thing again. One day she'll tell me *everything,* and be just gloriously simple and natural, and the next she'll do something spiteful, as though she hated me. It's that spite I don't understand, Freddy. For instance, telling father that I hit you that night. That's what makes everything so difficult, because it makes one feel so contemptible when some one is spiteful to one. See what I mean? *Why* be spiteful, of all things? I can't understand any one being spiteful. . . ."

"But, Raphael, you said at first that *they* were punishing you? Well, let's say Ysabel is one. But who's 'they'?"

Young Raphael's lips twitched, but he controlled his voice. "Father, of course," he said.

"But you told me yourself the other day that what was so amazing about the whole thing was that he had said scarcely a word to you about the diamond and had dressed you down quite mildly about that silly blow!"

Raphael turned to him in breathless excitement, with face flushed, and stammered: "And you guessed then

that he was up to something, didn't you? I knew you did, I could see it by your face. And he was, Freddy! Do you know what he's been up to, what he's up to now? Freddy, he's making love to Ysabel! Can you imagine it! Love—and that monstrous old man! Freddy, what's the matter with some people, why does it seem that they simply *have* to do awful things? And all the time he's terribly nice to me, charming, kind, everything. At first I couldn't make out what it was all about, it seemed so strange, his being kind and nice. Then I began to love him for it and to think I'd been wrong about him. You know how he can be when he wants people to like him? You remember how he used to be with Lloyd George during the war, when he wanted L.G. to like him? Not ingratiating, I don't mean that, but *concentrated*—he concentrates on people. That's what I'm getting at, he's been concentrating on me. And at first I swallowed it—imagine that, Freddy! And I wouldn't believe the other thing either, not till it had been drummed down my throat. For that's what he's doing now, just shoving it at me. Can you beat it, Freddy—for just hot-making hurtfulness? At first I thought, naturally, that he just happened to be seeing something of Ysabel in connection with her career—you know, publicity and that kind of thing, and also he's a large shareholder in a lot of theatres, got a finger in everywhere. How could I believe he was making love to Ysabel—trying to make her his mistress—just because I'd told him that I'd marry her like a shot any day if she'd have me! Wanting her for his mistress, Freddy—have you got *that*? And me standing quietly by and realising nothing—until I saw that the whole thing was his idea of a plot for punishing me! He's quite open about his liking for her, and lets me know in all sorts of ways how much time she spends with him—you know, banteringly, that 'you young men don't know how to go about these things' business. He even tells

the servants to look sort of knowingly at me when I come home at night and ask if the old man is still up. I'll kill that little pipsqueak Seabright one day. And then as I go up to my room I'll hear dad's great lousy voice somewhere, and Ysabel's laugh, and sometimes her ukulele. Look here, Freddy, I'm telling you facts, I swear I am. Sometimes he and I will be dining alone, then he will give directions in front of me for supper to be laid for two in the upstairs room, and he'll just let that sink in and later on I can hear Ysabel coming from the theatre, and her laugh. . . ."

Then Mr. Messenger was doubled up with a fit of coughing, and it was when that was over that he gave his analysis of old Townleigh's pursuit of Ysabel, how it was the logical outcome of his competitive predatory nature. Raphael listened quite patiently, smoking one cigarette after another, but gradually beads of perspiration came out on his forehead, as though he was boiling with things unsaid that his friend could never say because of his ignorance of his subject. And at last he stammered fretfully:

"Look here, Freddy, you don't know dad as I do. I tell you he's got old-fashioned ideas about what's right and what's wrong between father and son. The son shall obey the father in all things without complaint, and if he's fool enough not to then the father shall punish the son with all the means at his disposal and up to the limit of the son's endurance. That's his firm conviction, Freddy, there's no getting away from that. But," he went on slowly, carefully, as a young man will who does not wish to give his listener any chance of discounting the verity of his words on the ground of over-excitement, " but Freddy, there's a limit to my endurance. There is to everybody's, isn't there? And that's what I'm waiting for. And that's what dad's waiting for too—and then he'll slacken off. Oh rather, for he's not a bit cruel or hard once he's made his point. By God, Freddy, imagine enjoying a life in which one

had to make one's *point* or be wretched about it! But I was telling you, we're just waiting, both of us—but dad doesn't know *where* that limit is and *when* it will be reached—and I do, don't you see! If only dad knew that he wouldn't be so comfortable, that's what I mean. But he doesn't know, and he's pushing me nearer to it every day, nearer and nearer and nearer. And then what will happen, Freddy? What'll happen then?"

It was pitiable to Mr. Messenger to see the boy doing his utmost to state his case with a show of calmness and reason, pitiable and at the same time menacing, for this new quietness, this new and "reasoned" subjection to a sense of the approaching inevitable, was fraught, in a nature at once so timid and so tempestuous, with, as it were, *im*possibilities of misconduct. And of those *im*possibilities of misconduct that are so damnably possible to certain natures, who could be more acutely aware than he who had in the long distant past been the notorious Freddy Messenger? So he made up his mind that at the first opportunity he would go and have it out with the old scoundrel. The disorders of young Raphael's mind were come to be too confoundedly well ordered for the comfort of his friends.

He said to Raphael: "Why don't you go to your father—now, he'll just have got home from the office—and have it out with him? Thoughts like these are rotting your mind, Raphael, and not getting you anywhere——"

"Oh, aren't they! Don't you be so sure."

"Don't be a baby, and do as I tell you. But when you go to him now you must go without reserve and suspicion, but with trust and love. That's all he's waiting for, Raphael. It doesn't fundamentally matter if you're in the right and he's in the wrong, it doesn't matter who's in the wrong or in the right—what does matter is to get close together so that spite can't get in between. That's what I was thinking of when you were

speaking of spite and how you couldn't understand why people were spiteful. And all the time, for years now, you've been spiteful to the old man, Raphael. And Esther was very spiteful, too. His children haven't been very kind to him, Raphael. You said something very good, that when people are spiteful to one it makes one feel contemptible to oneself. What do you think your father has been passing through, then? Do you realise how you've been humiliating him all these years —Esther first, and then you—by not showing, by refusing to show, by *spitefully* refusing to show your love for him? Do you realise, you young fool, that your father is just a sentimental and silly old man who is yearning for the love of his children—and that when you are dealing with him you are dealing with a man who has been humiliated to the dust by his own children?"

"Gold-dust!" Raphael grinned nervously. "I get you, kid. God, how the old man loves money—and how I hate it!"

Mr. Messenger said: "I would punch your head for that sneering 'gold-dust' gibe, but it's so low down that I couldn't reach it. And, Raphael, if you go on putting yourself so far below the level of your unhappiness you will soon be so low down that one won't be able to see you at all."

Raphael sobbed: "For God's sake, Freddy!"

There was a quick rattling of the invisible iron stairway. Then Savile came in. His sudden entrance had an extraordinary effect on young Raphael. He jumped up, looked imploringly at Freddy Messenger, and stammered: "I'll be going at once, at once. I didn't know you were expecting any one. . . ."

Savile stared at him in surprise, and said: "But we've met, what's the matter?" Then, to his friend's relief, he quickly grasped that Raphael was "rattled" and looked away from him. "Well, Freddy, I just dropped in to see how you were. . . ."

"About time, after two weeks," Mr. Messenger pretended to grumble.

Savile said he had been working. He threw his hat down somewhere and, with that suddenly truculent absent-minded gesture of his which his friend knew so well—and which, so far from meaning truculence, merely meant that Savile was depressed and on the defensive about his depression—picked up the first book that came to his hand and looked to see its title. Young Raphael stood about uncertainly and several times began to say something but appeared to be unable to continue. Mr. Messenger noticed that he seemed unable to take his eyes off Savile, and wondered if the boy was foolish enough to be still jealous.

Savile, sitting where Raphael had sat, said abruptly: "It's simply idiotic, Freddy! You *must* go to——"

"Oh, bother Davos! What on earth am I to do there, Charles, even if I could afford it? Whereas here," he smiled at Raphael, "there are our young friend's exciting disorders. . . ."

Savile, instantly taking his friend's remark as a hint to include Raphael in the conversation and thus put him at his ease, also smiled towards the boy. Raphael, flushing crimson with pleasure at the kind expressions on the two men's faces, stammered:

"I've been sitting here for hours . . . boring Freddy with my troubles."

"Well, you have and you haven't," his host said candidly.

Savile, smiling up at the restless elegant young figure, said: "And I suppose I've taken your seat. I'm sorry, but there *must* be others. . . ."

"Yes, sit down, sit down!" Mr. Messenger said.

But Raphael appeared to have something so urgent on his mind that he hadn't, as it were, time to think about sitting down. He suddenly astonished both men by saying to Savile with a very solemn face: "I want to talk to you, Mr. Savile. I'd have called to see you

ages ago, but I couldn't face it. . . ." He saw Mr. Messenger's suddenly significant expression and said with dignity: "It's all right, Freddy, it's nothing to do with Ysabel——"

"I should think not!"

Raphael, still with great dignity, went on to Savile, who now looked completely bewildered: "It's about more . . . well, more important people than Ysabel and me. The only d-difficulty is that it will sound so d-damned cheeky. . . ."

"It sounds," Mr. Messenger chuckled, "pretty odd already."

Raphael said with astonishing firmness: "You'll find it's not really a bit odd if you will only listen."

"Well, I'm listening," said Savile, as seriously as he could.

Raphael's hands trembled pitifully as he tried—deftly, too deftly—to light a cigarette. In the end Savile gave him a light.

"Thank you," said Raphael very courteously.

"Oh, get on with your story!" grinned Mr. Messenger.

Raphael addressed himself to Savile, trying to speak, and indeed succeeding in speaking, impressively. "I'm going to be very impertinent, Mr. Savile, and that's what is bothering me. But I'll justify it later on—my impertinence, I mean—and I can, I've thought it all out ages ago, exactly what I'd say to you when I got the chance and exactly how. . . . I'd justify the cheek of it. The point is, you see, that I know you're in love with Venetia——" And lo, exit dignity! For, as though overwhelmed with fear lest the two men's utter astonishment might thrust itself like a powerful wedge into his speech, he rushed on headlong, breathlessly, in a frenzy of excitement, confession, and exhortation: "And I approve—enormously! You see, Venetia and I were kids together, I've known her all my life, and I love her—I thought once that I loved her *physically,*

but I'm made of lower stuff than she is and I soon realised that I loved her as though neither of us were made of flesh and blood but were just . . . you know, pieces of the breath of God . . . you know what I mean. And I'm not saying that to flatter myself, there's nothing nice about me, but just to show you how Venetia can bring the best even out of me. When I'm with her I feel exalted, unselfish, quite a different person. . . . And so when I found out that you and she were . . . well, I assure you I've been terribly worried ever since, I've been trying to work it all out, for of course I understand the difficulties of such a situation and I've been longing just to explain to you that she and you . . ."

Freddy Messenger could no longer restrain a burst of laughter at the chaos in which poor young Raphael was floundering. Raphael, of course, laughed at himself too. Savile just gasped out something that sounded like: "But how—how the dickens, may I ask, did you jump to the conclusion that I——"

Raphael almost yelled in his excitement: "How did I find out about your loving Venetia? You'll notice I'm not saying anything about her . . . about her feelings. That wouldn't be fair, would it, and it wouldn't be respectful either. But how did I find out about you? Because for one thing I'm not half so bilgeworthy as I look and for another where Venetia is concerned I'm terribly sensitive to impressions and atmospheres and things—I feel, if you understand, that I'm on a higher plane of understanding. . . ." Stopping as though to draw breath, and now carried away by his own words far beyond the reach of any fear at the singular impression his "impertinence" might naturally be making, he turned to Mr. Messenger. "Haven't I always told you, Freddy, that take away from me my education and you'd find me a reasonable human being? Now this is how I found out about Mr. Savile—with enormous approval, as I've told you, for you know the enormous

respect I have for his brains. One afternoon about three weeks ago I was tearing down Brook Street when I saw him coming out of Venetia's house"—and Raphael, with the triumphant merriment of a child, grinned all over his face—"there you are, Freddy, look at him now—blushing! He came out of Venetia's house as though he was in a dream, as though he'd been knocked on the head—Mr. Savile, I assure you that this awful cheek isn't as bad as it sounds, that I can justify it—and he looked so unhappy that I just boiled over with rage about—oh, life, everything! And then, though I had an urgent appointment with Ysabel—which she didn't keep, by the way—I rushed in to see Venetia—not to be beastly and inquisitive, of course, but just to be there and helpful, because—well, because people who love one another spiritually should be round about each other at difficult times, shouldn't they? And there Venetia was, in just the same sort of state as Savile had been outside, white and tired—terribly tired and terribly unhappy. Oh dear, oh dear! I only stayed a moment and of course I didn't say a word about anything in particular—but I said to myself, and I've been saying to myself ever since, that this thing has simply *got* to be arranged somehow because——"

"Because?" said Freddy Messenger so sharply that Savile was jerked out of his absorption in young Raphael to stare round at him. Savile had now for some minutes been listening to the excited youth with no thought whatsoever of "cheek" but merely intent to find out all he could about Venetia.

Raphael, after that "Because?" stared over Savile's head out of the grubby window. He seemed to be quite alone, to have forgotten them, to be quite cut off from what he had been saying. Savile mentally cursed Freddy's tyrannical, tiresome, psycho-analytical "Because?" for having abruptly stopped the works of the watch. At last Raphael, with a strained self-deprecat-

ing smile, stammered: "Because, Mr. Savile, I'm at the end of everything."

It should be inserted here that whenever young Raphael said anything like that his voice sounded "affected," unreal. He was too conscious of himself, and the longing to be different from himself would every now and then overwhelm him. Just as a man who is determined to be "fit" begins every Monday morning with physical exercises but somehow forgets all about them when he awakes on Tuesday morning, so Raphael would begin a serious conversation determined to keep his weaknesses in subjection, but in a few seconds those very same weaknesses would drive everything else out of his head. In trying, for instance, to fight down the rush of self-pity that always welled up in him whenever he thought of himself, he would at first go to the other extreme and sound affectedly over-calm; but by the time he had uttered a few sentences his self-pity would quite overcome his powers of resistance, and he would be himself again.

"It's been coming on," he stammered, "for a long time now, for years—a sort of gnawing certainty about myself—about the way I was getting to the *end* of myself in a much shorter time than most people. It's difficult to explain, words only get in the way when one's dealing with the soul. . . . Lots of people, for instance, get to the end of themselves without even realising it, and they go on living quite happily, being 'contented' they call it——"

Savile said quickly: "I see what you mean."

"I knew you would!" Raphael stammered excitedly, as though Savile's understanding had been the one thing necessary to his "explanation." "For instance, this being 'in love' and getting desperate about it, in the case of people like me . . . one's desperate, really, because one's clutching at a last straw, one *knows* one can't go on as oneself any longer but must have some inner addition to oneself—some great love

or self-sacrifice or something. But all the time one knows that that isn't going to come off either, that nothing can stop one from getting to the *end* of oneself, simply because one just isn't worthy of any inner additions . . . one simply *can't* love greatly or be unhappy greatly, whereas other people—you, for instance, Mr. Savile, and Venetia too—can't just sit down after a while and say to yourselves, 'Well, that's that, now I'm at the *end* of myself and I may as well shoot myself for all the good I'll be either to myself or anyone else in this world.' . . . It isn't as easy for you as that, for you've *got* to go on, you've got to be worthy of—to be worthy of your unhappiness, that's what I mean! There you are——" Raphael almost shouted in his excitement, as though he had won some important game, entirely forgetting that it was Mr. Messenger who had suggested the idea to him—"there you are, I knew I'd get the keyword to explain what I mean. Yes, that's it, that's where people like me have to realise where we get off, that we're no damn *good,* that there's an end to us . . . because even if we're unhappy we can't shoulder the unhappiness and go on our way with it and reach an understanding of other people through it . . . but we get *under* it, we're unhappy in an unfine way, we're not worthy of our unhappiness. . . . What I mean is, even if this *does* sound rather literary, that we haven't any fine reserves, we've only soiled secrets. Why, look at Venetia and Ysabel! Why does a woman like Ysabel instinctively dislike Venetia, just on sight, phut? Look here, I'm not saying a word against Ysabel—she's just inevitably part of that *end* of me which I've been trying to explain I've reached—but I know her as well as I know the Brighton Road. Now suppose Venetia, an absolute stranger, walked into a room where Ysabel was sitting with all the Best People—suppose Venetia was just nothing at all—which she is socially, anyhow, thanks to that beast Serle . . . well, in spite of that, Ysabel

would instantly feel that she belonged to one species of the human race and Venetia to another—and Ysabel would feel more than ever exasperated at realising, for she's no fool, that whereas she was conscious of this difference it simply wouldn't occur to Venetia even to think about it at all. What exasperates lots of people —now see if I'm right, Mr. Savile—is not the consciousness that some people are superior to them but that those people don't or won't realise their superiority—because as soon as a man realises his superiority to another that at once puts him on the same plane as his inferior by giving his inferior a peg to hang his dislike on. Ysabel would instinctively have with Venetia—in fact, she *has*—that 'Second Mrs. Tanqueray' feeling. I mean, Venetia would arouse in Ysabel what the woman of 'no importance' always seems on the stage to arouse in the other characters in the play—a sort of instinctive desperate hatred for some one who has a deep sense of fineness in human relations. See what I mean? For instance, Ysabel would *know* that if she and Venetia ever happened to fall in love with the same man—I hope they never do, for Ysabel would be sure to get him in the end—the differences between their unhappinesses about him, even if the unhappinesses *looked* almost the same, would be as inevitably and as unalterably different as—well, as the domestic habits of a Hottentot are from ours."

Breathless, bewildered, ashamed, Raphael suddenly emerged to a consciousness of his endless monologue. "Good Lord!" he said, flushing crimson, smiling piteously. "Boring you like this—good Lord!"

Savile was about to say something to put him at his ease when Raphael, having looked at his own watch, jerked out to his host in a voice poignant with the worst expectations: "What's the time, Freddy?"

"Getting near seven."

"Good Lord, I was due at Ysabel's at a quarter-past six! She'll be furious! Good Lord, how shall I ex-

plain! Look here, Freddy, she thinks you're the world's wonder, how would it be if you just rang her up and —no, that's idiotic, I'll just run round there and pretend I didn't know I was so late and anyway that you two had been so interesting that I'd forgotten all about her. She'll be furious when she hears I've been with you, Mr. Savile. She thinks you're a menace to my lofty and spiritual character—that because (*a*) she's American; (*b*) she thinks you're bedworthy, and (*c*) she hates herself for thinking so—poor Ysabel, she can't help the way she's made, can she? Hell, I must go!"

While talking he had been executing the most astonishingly diverse movements: picking up Savile's hat, dropping it, trying to find his own, dropping it, taking out a cigarette, dropping it, fumbling for a match, looking for his hat again, shaking Savile's hand, stumbling over books, rushing to the door without his hat—and finally, the soft black hat on his head looking as though an untenanted house had been swept with it, he was dashing out of the low doorway—when, struck by a thought of importance, he turned back. His face was glistening with perspiration, and no wonder. He stammered:

"Look here, Mr. Savile, go to her—to Venetia—now, this evening. That's what I've been really wanting to tell you. I know things *look* awfully difficult, but——Oh, damn it, she's so unhappy and—you'll see and one day you'll thank me. Hell, I must go, I'm as late as summer in Iceland. Good-bye, good-bye."

As he rushed out now he forgot that the doorway was low and he was tall, so off came that hat again, but this time he tore away without it. Savile picked it up and leaned out of the window to throw it at him, but young Raphael, calling out something he could not make out, ran so swiftly across Ducking Pond Mews that the hat fell short of his heels by yards.

Mr. Messenger, even as the stairway was rattling

with Raphael's headlong exit, had picked up the telephone from the floor beside him and asked for old Townleigh's number. Savile, reseating himself after the hat episode, said: "What's the good of that? What will you tell him?"

The other, his hand over the mouthpiece, said: "I'm just going to tell him to keep an eye on that young man. I had a nasty feeling—idiotic, probably, but there it was—from the moment he began on that Venetia subject that he—well, that in trying to bring you two together he was sort of making his will."

Savile sighed: "Well, he certainly leaves a crazy atmosphere behind him, that boy!"

Mr. Messenger smiled. "Was he so crazy as all that, in what he said about you?"

Savile was about to say sharply whatever one does say sharply on such occasions when Mr. Messenger spoke into the mouthpiece: "Seabright? Has his lordship come home yet?"

The next thing Savile heard his friend say was: "Look here, Seabright, this is rather important. You've got my number, haven't you? I want you to do something for me. If anything in the least odd—just odd, you understand, and just anything—happens this evening, ring me up at once, will you? Thank you, Seabright. You expect his lordship back home tonight, do you? For breakfast, I should say. Oh, yes, I'm much better, quite well again now. Thank you, Seabright."

Savile said: "There was a sort of hearty irony about that 'for breakfast' which nobody could miss. . . ."

Freddy Messenger, exhausted and almost inaudible after a particularly vicious attack of his cough, said hoarsely: "If people really knew how much they hurt each other by the things they did I wonder if they could do them. But they never seem to *know*. Take what they've done to that poor kid. He rushes from here with his ears flapping in the wind and his tongue

hanging out of his mouth with eagerness to see his girl —to find that she's not at home because at the last moment she's gone down to Southampton with his father to dine on his father's yacht. You can imagine young Raphael staring at the servant who tells him that. . . ."

After a pause Savile said: "Alone? Ysabel and the old man?"

"Seabright said there was a small party."

Savile made a face at that. Mr. Messenger, comically imitating Vardon's snap, said: "I agree. Those small parties. . . ."

"The rich man, the parasite, two nice little girls, and many servants. . . ."

"Yes. And," Mr. Messenger added, "the rich man despising himself for wasting his time and energy but trying to persuade himself and every one of his romantic, care-free and amorous temperament by continually pretending to the parasite and the two nice little girls that he is tortured by jealousy of the parasite for the attentions paid to him by the nice little girls. Also, that helps to make conversation. . . ."

Thus Mr. Messenger spoke, the while he knew that Savile was only pretending to listen and glad to give Savile time to think out his thoughts under the delusion that his friend thought he was listening. How strange men are, with what indomitable perseverance they persist in their illusions, and the greatest illusion of all that governs them is that something significant about them, such as an emotion, a pain, a pleasure, an anxiety, is unnoticeable to every one. In the same way the man who is habitually unable to wash his neck with patience is also habitually under the delusion that no one "notices" anything amiss with him. Wherefore Mr. Messenger reflected: "Men will not really see themselves until they have conquered the unconscious habit of regarding their fellow-men as blind."

IT was in a state of the most determined absent-mindedness that Savile, on leaving Ducking Pond Mews, turned towards Brook Street. The hour was about seven o'clock. He was reluctant, however, to erase that "about" by the simple expedient of looking at his watch. One finds oneself, when one is "vague" about the time, a more sympathetic person than when one knows its passage to the minute. Statisticians have proved beyond a doubt that only the nicer sort of men ever miss trains. Moreover, that "about seven o'clock" formed in Savile's mind an, as it were, attractive residence in which his shyness walked with a not too blundering step—until it chanced on and quickly withdrew from a room that was gaunt with the sense of dignity that waits on the hour of eight o'clock in civilised places. For it is obvious to even the most unsocial, to even the most "artistic" sort of intelligence, that whereas one may "call" at a house at about seven o'clock, one can't at eight o'clock do anything less pointed, less portentous, than be discovered "seeking admittance."

With such doubts, then, preying on his mind he was approaching the door of the house in Brook Street when that very door was flung wide open and out ran Trellis, and before you could say "knife" arrested a passing taxi-cab. Then, in his haste not noticing Savile, who was now within a yard of the doorway, Trellis ran back into the house. He had notably flat feet, the poor man. Savile could but wait, and wait he did, picturesquely reflecting: "I have been waiting for thirty-seven years." Then back came Trellis puffing and panting and perspiring, weighed down by a suitcase in each hand and burdened with a great leather bag of golf-clubs. Ah, the poor man! And with it all he tried to smile as, bustling out of the door-

way, he saw Savile and panted: "Is that you, sir! Just one moment, sir!"

Savile reflected again on what had often surprised him, how it wasn't at all unusual for men like Jasper Vardon, men who simply could not behave, to be faithfully served by devoted and decent servants. It was very true that men are rewarded according to a law men know nothing of.

The taxi-driver was obviously an independent sort of man, for help Trellis he did not. Savile said: "Here, Trellis, I'll help you. Of course I'll help you. All those bags!"

But the amount of help he was allowed to give was naturally confined by all those traditions of feudalism of which Trellis was the desolate, longsuffering and flat-footed remnant to gestures and noises of willingness. However, it is the spirit that counts. And by establishing with the willingness of his spirit a connection with Trellis (in spite of Trellis) on a basis rather different from that usually obtaining between a caller at a house and the butler thereof, he ceased very pleasantly to feel so completely "outside" that dear house.

"So," said Savile, almost beaming with happiness, "Mr. Vardon's going away, is he?"

"To Biarritz, sir. And I fancy his calling here to get some things has left him no more than just time to catch——"

Vardon's voice: "I agree, Trellis. Quick, man! Hello, Savile, that you? Come back to the land of the living again, have you? Go in and get Venetia to give you a cocktail. Good-bye—good-bye, Trellis. Back in September, God willing."

How surprising it was, just a few seconds later, to be hurled down from his good fortune—for hadn't he been unbelievably lucky in being, after all, "invited" in?—to be sharply arrested on his march down the avenue of expectation, to be acutely distressed, to see

the bright world darkening before his very eyes, by a voice in the lounge saying from behind an evening paper:

"Why, it's Savile! Just dropped in for a cocktail? Venetia will be down in a minute."

Savile had, at that moment, and throughout a part of that tormented and blessed night, a new impression of Serle. It was an impression that weighed on him by reason of its, shall we say, "favouritism" towards Serle. Heavily it weighed on him. The realisation that one can like a man to whom one is fundamentally antagonistic (how that word "fundamentally" excuses one from explanations!) opens up an aspect of oneself that is wellnigh intolerable in its fatuousness.

The politician was so quiet and courteous, so friendly: so unworried, one fancied, by small points: so, one had to face it, attractive. One understood how Serle could, when he so wanted, inspire confidence and affection. There was, in his easy moments, a slackening of that insistent call on one's immediate attention that ordinarily makes the company of eminent men, in even their easiest moments, so tiring. Here he was with, so to speak, his slippers on, and quiet and attractive in them, too. Here he was, charming—at home! For there, at that "at home," in its most domestic sense, was whither Savile's new impression of Serle led him within a very few minutes, to that "at home" where Serle was and felt completely settled in a state which called on him neither to be aggressive nor defensive, but, in the most natural way possible, to allow an acquaintance to intrude on a quiet evening which he was enjoying with his . . . and Savile, in that darkened world of his, was not even surprised at the natural way in which the word presented itself . . . mistress.

And as that impression grew, as unhappy impressions nearly always do, into a fact, it was only curiosity about her, about her attitude, that kept him lingering over the bitter cocktail that Trellis brought to him.

He couldn't help but wonder whether, now that he was at last to see her coldly in the routine of her familiar life with Serle, she too had acquired, like so many women, that *oldness* about what others eagerly call "love," that oldness which holds within it a permanent rejection of passing fancies—like himself, Savile! It was that oldness about love that made, apparently, those long and indestructible intimacies possible between men and women who were commonly considered to be "unsuitable" for each other. It was that *oldness* that made, apparently, to even the loneliest and youngest of beautiful women, any outside demands seem fussy, unnecessary, vulgar.

Resignation! What a Judge Jeffreys women could make of it, executing happiness without a hearing. . . .

Serle, interrupting himself, said: "Here she is at last! Venetia, here's Savile dropped in for a cocktail."

As he had expected, she was completely calm, at her ease. That, at least, was how the atmosphere of her entrance affected him, for he hadn't for what seemed to him a long while any direct impression of her. The depth and force of his hunger for her, which had already driven him to making this stupid call this evening, now raised before his eyes a cloud obscuring everything . . . everything, that is, but a picture of himself straining his utmost to look, to sound, passably normal. He found to his astonishment that as he forced the words out of his mouth there came a very definite pain into the pit of his stomach.

He could visually realise no more of her than that she was a slender something in white. . . .

"I'm so glad you thought of coming in. Has Trellis given you a cocktail yet? Peter doesn't drink and as father doesn't live here now maybe he's out of practice, but he used to make an old-fashioned Martini of which he was very proud indeed."

Savile explained how, as he was passing, he had seen her father rushing away and had taken advantage

of the open door to creep in. Her father, she told him, was on his way to Biarritz. "A dear friend of his was operated on for cancer a little while ago—and the operation wasn't—or couldn't be, I don't know—successful——"

Serle said: "Cancer of the liver. Terrible."

She smiled nervously. "Peter's one obsession. If a gnat bites him he thinks it's a tumour. . . ."

How we all prey on each other, how the sudden perception of another's weakness lends us strength, what a snatching and clutching goes on in the secret places of the nerves! No sooner had Venetia spoken, quickly, with a nervousness that penetrated even his numbed senses, than instantly his vision cleared, she emerged. He saw that she was pale and serious. A slender, large-eyed girl with curly gleaming hair.

She looked, he thought, discouraged. But how carefully yet lightly she carried her discouragement, as though it was an unlit taper in the darkening halls of her experience. And, he realised helplessly, that taper she would never light, for she was so afraid of what she would see.

Serle, deep in his chair, had picked up his paper again and his face was quite hidden behind it. "Go ahead!" the newspaper seemed to be saying to Savile. "Go ahead, my young friend, and see what you can do." As though he, Savile, was the man to snatch at such opportunities of insinuation as the tolerant aloofness of a third person will allow one of the other two! She, playing with a diamond ring, the only jewel she wore, was making talk. And suddenly, as though some barrier of resistance within him was forced down by his anger with Serle for being and for wanting to look so "safe" in his relations with Venetia, all his hungers and hopes and despairs since he had last seen her crowded together and sharply compressed themselves into a certainty, that stretched onwards from that moment like a shining road up a mountain, that he

must, somehow, anyhow, always be near her. Where she was not, there could only be darkness for him. And as he helplessly surrendered to that realisation . . . they were talking just then, trivially, of some mutual friend . . . such unrest filled him, an unrest so urgently pressing, such an ache for some sign of her possibility for him, that to cover the absurdly sudden silence that had overtaken him he had to jump up from the sofa on which they were sitting on the pretext of taking a cigarette from a box nearby. When he saw her again, through the flame of his match, she was looking at him, up at him, with the profound calmness of recognition. He almost, as he sat down again, dithered. She smiled very faintly with her lips, but her eyes, in which at that moment were caught up all the essences of her beauty, as by the hazards of light and shadow a pool of water will sometimes contain all of a countryside and all the bright colours in the sky, deliciously didn't lose that grave look of recognition. She knew, then, with that absolute certainty about unspoken things which is the heritage of women who don't talk much, her importance to him. She had "worked it all out" since they had last met. She had heard, was hearing now, his whole being crying out with love for her. And in listening to the language of his intoxicated silence it was as though she, in herself, transformed it into another, a language too fine to be understood, as it was too fine to be expressed, by the confused vocabulary of his silence. Her unemphasised sincerity, the quality of her generosity, filled the cup of his dreams of intimacy. How he had longed all his life for an intimacy in which neither of two people would even have to be conscious—in that unnatural mentally gushing way—of the sovereignty of truth between them, in which neither would ever have to emphasise his or her sincerity as though it was something creditable rather than inevitable. It was as though, at that moment, the crowded grubby sheet

of his experience became miraculously blank. And on it was drawn, by a pencil firm and fine, her face. She was the illustration of his hitherto unknown but always longed-for happiness.

When Serle spoke, or rather when he at last realised that Serle was speaking, he found that it was only with great difficulty that he could catch the meaning of words that seemed to him to come from another world. It seemed to him quite unimportant, anything that could be said in the language that Serle was using. The only thing of any importance to be said at that moment was for him to say to Serle, in the new language upon which he had stumbled: "I say, Serle, something amazing has happened to me. I'm afraid it concerns you too. What shall we do?" He actually found himself saying to Venetia, who at Serle's suggestion had asked him to stay to dinner, what he could no more help saying than he could help inhaling the cigarette he was smoking, that he would like to stay very much.

"Good!" said Serle, and Savile could not bring himself to be depressed even by the formal geniality of Serle's tone. He must certainly "make it up" to Serle one day for his unfairness in accepting an invitation that had been prompted only by courtesy.

Serle, as they sat down to dinner, said laughing: "What about the movies, Venetia? Shall we go? Do you ever, Savile?"

"Sometimes," Venetia explained, "Peter and I dine like this, on just any sort of food—you'll see soon enough, poor man!—and go to the pictures afterwards. Peter has an idea, by the way, that the pictures are still called 'movies' by the People, just as old Townleigh has an idea—you can tell by his papers every day—that there is a dance called the 'jazz.' They don't know even as much as children know, our leaders and governors, do they? Or is it that children grow up so much more quickly than their fathers? One can

imagine the awful two-minutes' silence that would fall on serried ranks of Boy Scouts if some visiting notable, wanting to be chatty and 'modern,' were to say to one of them: 'It's a topping day, isn't it, old bean?'"

For that evening it was as though, out of the ever-unplumbed well which is called "human nature" and from which, at moments of jealousy or malice or impatience, is always supposed to come the "worst side" of our characters, there had, instead, risen between Serle and Savile a will to think courteously of each other. They kept it up for quite a while too, gallantly. For his part, Savile, reflecting on all the stories he had heard of Serle—and on what, if it came to that, he knew about Serle from his own contacts with him—of his lack of principle as a politician, of his general "unsoundness" as a man, of his discourtesies, his ill-tempers, asked himself: "Aren't most men, anyhow most men of vigour and imagination, driven by some profound and unreasonable contempt for appearances, or by an equally exaggerated idea of the importance of appearances, into living lives that are quite *unlike* themselves?" He could, after all, look back into his own life, and not so far back into it either, and see staring at him superciliously a slender and exquisite young man, anyhow as to clothes and the like, who, while having no actual connection with Savile, had yet used Savile's figure and talent to make for himself the deplorable life of a "young man of society." . . .

Serle talked a little of Savile's books, the later ones, with critical appreciation. Most intelligent people, Savile nowadays noticed with impersonal amusement, omitted any mention of his earlier novels, the enormously popular ones on which his fortune rested. Serle's present reference to the later tales was decidedly biassed, Savile couldn't help reflecting, in his, Savile's, favour. Once, indeed, Serle committed himself, in that decided voice of his, to the remark that Savile was by far the most considerable young man of letters in

Europe. But that sort of fatty exaggeration, Savile reflected, was all part of the personal life of Great Men: that gross flattery wasn't so much in keeping with Serle's character as with the general character of Great Men. One had often remarked how the great ones—politicians, millionaires, generals, novelists—would take every opportunity of flattering their fellow-men. Just as drug-maniacs, so one had often been told, were not content with the indulgence of their vile habit but must try to persuade others to give way to it, so the great ones would be continually trying to make their vanity seem more normal to themselves by appealing to the vanities of their friends. Savile had often seen clear-headed and ordinarily modest men sit and listen quite seriously to some powerful man's gross eulogies.

Venetia hardly spoke throughout dinner. Savile, furtively glancing aside at her now and then, couldn't help wondering what was passing behind those thoughtful funnily helpless eyes as clear as water that is so clear that you cannot see how deep it is. The white of her dress was as though diffused over her skin. Her beauty was as though caught up, imprisoned, in a white bowl. She was so still, so utterly uncommunicative of her thoughts in that quite inoffensive way of one who has had a long experience of listening. Oh, she listened! There wasn't, apparently, a gesture of that timid art that she hadn't long since mastered. Now and then, as Serle talked, she would look most directly across the table at him. Like the sudden blooming of a flower, it was like that. Then, as though the flower was content at having shown what it could do, it willingly drooped. She had already reached then, in the cheerless pilgrimage of her youth, that stage where she had collected all the decentest tricks of listening, she had already reached that mentally matronly point where she automatically "reacted" to the idea of *not hurting* Serle, of seeing that he shouldn't be hurt.

And Serle, probably, had never noticed that, didn't dream of it.

Serle was one of those successful Englishmen who are inclined to think that the whole business of conversation is to treat women as though they are very far from being the whole business of life. Which, of course, is true, but . . .

In those days, during Labour's first and brief tenure of office ("My dear fellow, a man's got to have something of the gentleman in him to govern!") feeling was running high between the parties. Serle was a master of the gibe political. Like all Great Men, he seldom believed what he said, but he always believed in the reason why he said it. That is a great help in political argument, inspiring respect in the audience for the intelligence of the orator and in the orator for his own. In conversation, however, Serle permitted his intelligence to rise above his politics. He was mortal, melancholy. He regretted that nearly all the sensible young men were Labour in sympathy. He regretted that the Conservative Party swarmed with young fatheads and prosperous idiots.

Savile, who agreed with him, suggested: "All the same, the English idiot, as a political type, has an enormous sense of responsibility. . . ."

"To England, you mean?"

"To dead ideas. . . ."

"The Lord be praised for it! Unlike the Russian idiot, the Italian idiot, most other idiots. Ideas, my dear Savile, are the curse of government. Whereas the English idiot, as you say, is a *responsible* idiot. He divides the world into two halves, 'cynics' and 'enthusiasts,' and his only political idea is to stand midway between those two halves and to despise them without being too disagreeable. That midway station between 'cynics' and 'enthusiasts,' my dear Savile, is called Sanity. An invaluable word, discovered and copyrighted by the Conservative Party. Labour can have

all the brains. We don't want brains. It's on the 'sanity' of the prosperous idiot that the rock of British government rests. You can't lead brains."

Serle was that rarest of English politicians—neither a Welshman, an Irishman, a Scotsman, an American, Canadian, or a Jew, but an Englishman. He knew the English people. Now the English, as opposed to other races, are commonly supposed—by the English—to mistrust words, phrases. What an Englishman is supposed exactly to do with a word or a phrase, what the exact procedure of "mistrusting" is, has never yet been clearly defined. But whatever it is, the English way of behaving towards words and phrases is held to be highly creditable to Englishmen. Serle, however, like some great English politicians of the past and unlike the consciously "England, my England!" politicians of the present, had an impolite national intelligence. He knew, for instance, that his countrymen would follow a phrase as loafers will follow a procession, that their loyalty to a word, if repeated often enough, would surpass the dreams of demagogues. But the phrase must be familiar, the word must not glitter. It must be sound, serious, homely. It must be good. The English people are a good people. Serle gave them a good word. It was "sanity."

Other men, lesser men, are apt now and then to talk in a querulous way about "sanity." Serle had talked about it incessantly and magnificently for twenty years. And through him the Conservative Party had become, in the idiotically pretentious American phrase, "identified with" sanity. England as a whole, however, was apparently experiencing some difficulty in illuminating itself with this identification. The people who were trying to keep England and sanity apart were, of course, the Reds. The Reds were men who got Money from Moscow and through sheer cussedness gave it to Honest British Working Men instead of having a beano with it themselves. This made the *Morning*

Post furious. Lord Townleigh's papers, on the other hand, were unable to believe that the sanity of the English people had entirely deserted them. (This was the summer of 1924.) They went further, and professed immense pride in the never-failing sanity of the English people, while deploring that laxity in high places which allowed crafty and ceaseless attacks to be made on that never-failing sanity by Paid Agitators. Lord Townleigh's newspapers believed that the Honest British Working Man would not suffer the treacheries of Paid Agitators for long. (There are no Unpaid Agitators. Why should there be?) Sanity was what the H.B.W.M. wanted, not Socialism. Sanity looked like Mr. Baldwin. It even looked like Sir W. Joynson-Hicks. The faces of Mr. Baldwin and Sir W. Joynson-Hicks were not expected to shine with intellect. They did not. Their supporters boasted that they did not. They shone, calmly, indefatigably, with sanity.

And Serle, cynical and contemptuous, still mistrusted in his own party for his long and loyal alliance with Lloyd George during and immediately after the war, stood for the while darkling in the background and let the popular little men with their pipes and their nicknames exert all the small sciences of gentlemanliness in their efforts to settle international debts and in the increasingly bitter fight with the Trade Unions. . . .

Savile was that weakest of debaters and most provocative to listeners, the man who cannot help being preoccupied with the futility of argument.

"It isn't any longer a question," Serle said, "of a struggle between Capital and Labour, but between a tradition of government and the Trade Union leader. And of course we can't help winning, for a tradition of government is, stripped of all newspaper humbug and propaganda nonsense, a tradition of craft. For instance, the main business of the Conservative Party for the next ten years will be, with the help of men like Townleigh and by every fair or foul means at our

disposal, to put the Trade Unionists against their leaders. And I'll bet you anything you like that we shall see, well within our lifetime . . ."

Ah, "in our lifetime"!

There, in that "lifetime," was the worm in the political mind. "We shall see in our lifetime." "Not in our lifetime." What had Wells, in one of his novels, said about that? Anyhow, he had sworn at men like Serle. They and their blasted "lifetimes!" They thought, the irresponsible asses, in terms of their fatuous "lifetimes." . . .

"It's past nine," Venetia suddenly said. "If we're going we ought not to be too late."

"Right!" said Serle, putting an amazing amount of, Savile thought, potential activity into that simple word. It was amazing, and terrifying too, the stored-up energy in these men—Serle, Vardon, old Townleigh. And that energy appeared to have nothing to do with brains, with will-power even, it was just a blind and desperate urge that swept them on and on. Over sickness and despair, over age and wisdom, that energy triumphed, that will to "go on" was paramount. What the devil could one do against such men, what whirlwind couldn't they ride? If only, Savile thought, saviours had such guts!

Serle went on: "But I've an important call to put through first. It won't take a moment." He rose jerkily, dark and untidy and handsome. He grinned, like a very young man, across the table at Venetia. A rebellious bang of black hair falling over his forehead made him look younger, more defiant, than ever.

Savile wondered at the sudden blankness of voice in which Venetia said: "Trellis will get the number for you."

"Oh, I'll get it, it's quicker."

He went out.

Savile thought: "If he wants to make her uncomfortable, he will close the door behind him."

He did.

Savile felt utterly unable to say anything.

"I'm afraid," she said, "you've had a very scratchy dinner."

He fiddled about with some words and then managed to say: "He's treating us, or rather me, like a child . . . who will, given the chance, get over something."

With the ash of her cigarette she was making a mess on her dessert-plate. Those arrowy eyelashes hid her eyes.

She said: "Yes. That generation—they're very odd, sometimes—elementary, but in an unsimple way. And they're so . . . hopeful. They're always wanting one, urging one, giving one the chance to 'get over' something or other. . . ." As though, the corners of her voice implied, one didn't in time, given the chance or not, "get over" everything. That depressed him, drove his silence inwards. Everything she said or didn't say implied to his state of mind a course of action or behaviour to which she was irrevocably committed.

She stared down at her plate, absorbed in pushing and piling the ash into little heaps with the end of her cigarette. The daylight was at last fading from the room, caressing everything as it retreated before the stately twilight outside the windows. Three yellow stars looked into the room.

"The lights," she said vaguely. "The switch is by the door."

But he did not move.

She made a stab at her plate with the end of her cigarette.

"Well?" she said faintly.

"I can't," he said, "*say* anything. . . ."

She said: "You must! What do you think I am, a clairvoyant?"

"How can I? These moments just . . . well, thrown at one! How can one talk?"

"It's no good thinking," she said. "I know. No good ever comes from thinking. . . ."

He thought of all the dreams he had dreamed in his life, the joyous and the painful dreams. He fingered them. They were theories, really, not dreams. Theories about the things that ought to happen. . . .

He said: "I've had theories about you for years—all my life, I think. And you'll agree that it makes conversation very difficult when all one's theories suddenly turn into one solid fact."

"Solid?" she said. "But I'm said to have a very good figure, small-boned, slender!"

He said: "You know what I mean. There'll be plenty of time to make jokes later."

She smiled dimly. "Yes. And there'll be plenty of time to bully me . . . later."

"Venetia, it's terrible, the weight of something happening that one thought never *could* happen!"

He realised that while he was with her—just because he was with her—he knew enough about love to be certain that he had never loved before.

She was smiling down at her plate. Her face was a pale shadow in the darkness.

"Those theories of yours, Charles? Oh Charles, you've kept them all then, intact? All this time? Theories, dreams, ideals. . . ."

"Yes."

"Oh, how rich you would be. . . ."

"Would be?"

"So stupid, Charles! In another world."

"So pessimistic, Venetia! Why do you say that?"

"I am a realist, darling. I don't believe in the leaders in the *Daily Mail,* I don't believe in the serials in the *Daily Express,* I don't believe in dreams, and I don't believe in theories. I just don't believe, darling."

He said: "I shall have to put you right about all this——"

"Yes, yes! Treat me like a 'dear little woman.'"

"Very well. For instance, about dreams——"

"Dreams, my darling, are the currency of another world, no use in this."

"Then again, take theories——"

"Theories, my darling, are the currency of another world, no use in this."

"But don't you see, Venetia—they've *got* to be of use in this—that's all!"

"Oh, you say that now!"

There was a pause, and then she said: "But when it comes to the point, it's you who won't let them be. . . ."

"That's not 'realism,' Venetia! That's just an unworthy and common-or-garden fear of being let down."

"But, Charles, that's all there is to realism—the common-or-garden fear of being let down."

He said: "Venetia, what are you frightened of? It's as though you're frightened, always. What of?"

"Everything."

He laughed at that. What in the world was there to be frightened of? There is only one fear in the world, and that is that the friends we have not yet met may fail us. And, since he had met her, that fear too was laid at rest.

"You'll see," she said.

She seemed to grow clearer, whiter, a shadow changed into a statue.

"What shall I see?" he mocked her.

"Yourself, of course!"

He had to brush away a vivid picture of himself interlocked with jealousy and doubt in the dark narrow lanes of love. . . .

She said: "Quick, a cigarette, please. How I smoke when you're about! Then go on talking. *Won't* you see, I'm hungry and thirsty? Don't you see even *that*! Now talk, talk quickly."

His eyes were moist with the joy of being in the

same world with her. In a trembling voice he told her that he did not know how he could live without her.

The room was quite dark now. But he could see her clearly, because he could see nothing else at all. Her eyes shone in the darkness, strangely steady eyes in a strangely unsmiling face.

"I'm glad," she said.

"And frightened, Venetia?"

"And very, very frightened. . . ."

He was standing beside her chair, above her. He bent down and touched her temple with his lips. Then he lingered at the joining of her soft sweet hair. And his heart was suddenly quiet, as a dark empty house that is troubled by a plague of noises, sighings and creakings grows suddenly quiet when it is flooded with light.

"I've warned you!" she said, with infinite melancholy.

He whispered his love into her soft sweet hair.

She said desperately: "I can't hear you! Oh angel, what a way to behave—to say things to me that I can't hear!"

Her body, as he stood closely above her, trembled against his arm. His love seemed to enter her life in a flood of wonder and pity and reverence, his love seemed to fly swiftly down her past years, a companion on the cheerless pilgrimage of her youth, a companion of her solitude and distress. And he was abashed and timid before an understanding of her that was born in a wiser part of him than his mind. And he was afraid, because he was so small in suffering. He was a vain companion for her, a man ill-nurtured in nobility and ill-fitted to understand the melancholy that is woven into the texture of all noble things.

Suddenly, with an almost brutal movement of her head, she threw up her face and caught his lips to hers. A world seemed to crash in his head. Through the long

quivering kiss her eyes were wide open, shining, staring up into his, expressionless. And his heart was helplessly poured into those dark eyes, leaving him empty. He could not understand what had happened, he was in despair. He prayed that those staring heavy eyes could not see into him, into the nothing that he had suddenly become. Her face was distorted with blankness, she was almost ugly. When he let her fall back into her chair, as he stepped back from her into the darkness, he did not love her. What, he wondered drearily, had happened? Why did he suddenly feel that he had made a ghastly mistake, that everything was dreary and purposeless and the *same*?

Glad that she could not see his face, he stared at her, a dim crumpled shadow. Gradually, through the darkness, he heard her deep broken breathing. And suddenly such a wave of tenderness rushed over him that he had to catch at her hand where it lay helplessly on the table. He covered it with kisses. He understood now. That other love had gone, that mad dream-love, that unreal and selfish love that is born of loneliness. Now he loved her more—he loved *her*. He had survived the old, old conflict between the false ideal and the beautiful inevitable, the Scylla and Charybdis between which so many unions have been racked and wrecked.

And as he sat down again at the table he knew that they would be together always, that their lives were bound together by a law over which they had no control. He knew that she would be his wife, that it would be so.

Sharply her voice broke the silence: "Peter, the lights!"

Light flooded the table. Instantly everything seemed commonplace, bustling. It was like stepping out of a secret forest onto a high road. Savile did not look towards Venetia. He felt her there, could feel where she was looking, her expression. . . .

Serle said: "Sorry I've been so long."

He, had he been in Serle's place, would have said those words in just that tone of casual geniality. "Sorry I've been so long."

Serle stood near his chair, dark, thoughtful. He seemed disinclined to sit down again.

He said: "Freddy detained me. He's outside."

Venetia cried: "Freddy? Freddy Messenger?"

"He's come for Savile. Had an idea he might be here."

Savile, somehow, was not in the least surprised. He couldn't, at that moment, think or see beyond Serle. Every little movement, every vagueness, every word, of Serle's seemed to him significant of all that had passed between Serle and Venetia. It seemed to him that if he watched every little movement and expression of Serle's he would find the key to the mystery of Serle's relations with Venetia.

"But why," Venetia asked, "did you let him wait out there instead of bringing him in to see us?"

Serle, still standing, looked over Savile's head at Venetia. It was the first time he had looked directly at her since his coming in. His eyes were tired, hopeless. His look said: "Because, Venetia, I didn't want to disturb you two in here too soon. And sitting in the darkness too!"

He actually said: "He's rather worried about something, Venetia. He sends you his love, but wants to see Savile urgently. He looks damned unwell, I must say. It's something, I fancy, about that young madman Raphael."

Venetia said anxiously: "Why, what's the matter with poor Raphael now?"

Serle and Savile were staring at each other. It was as though the past and the future of each one was at the back of that look. It had no existence in the present, no present meaning.

"I haven't," Serle said with an effort, "the faintest idea."

Savile moved in his chair. "I'd better go and see. Will you excuse me?"

"I didn't know you were a great friend of Raphael's?" They were her first direct words to him since Serle's return. They seemed to flutter in the air uncertainly. Serle, his hands in his pockets, turned towards the windows. Savile, even as his eyes met Venetia's, couldn't take his mind off the man. What was he thinking, feeling?

"He became so this evening," he told Venetia.

Serle was weighing on her too. She looked white, serious, helpless. There were unhappy loyalties astir in the depths of her eyes. In the room there was a hint of very ancient love and very ancient hate.

As he rose from the table she smiled gently at him, as though blessing him. He longed to hold her in his arms. The long slender thing. He was afraid of Serle's despair. Serle's despair was Serle's most formidable weapon against him. As he went to the door he met the older man's eyes again. They were tired, hopeless. They did not seem to see Savile. "He has been expecting this for years," Savile thought, "and now that it has come, he is in agony."

He closed the door behind him. And as he closed it the room he had left swept everything else from his mind, he vividly saw Venetia and Serle, she sitting as he had left her, white and serious, he standing, brooding. He could hear him say, with forced casualness: "And what did you two talk about all that time, sitting in the dark?" And he would not listen to her pale answer, but just weigh on her with his tired, hopeless eyes.

And when Serle looked tired, his tiredness would be a terrible force. . . .

Freddy Messenger was lounging thoughtfully about the wide hall.

Savile said: "How did you know I was here?"

Freddy Messenger looked faintly surprised, as though he hadn't expected such a question, as though it was an unintelligent one.

He said something, but Savile was staring at a diabolically vivid picture of Serle and Venetia close together. He felt almost physically sick. What he simply could not bear, among all the torturing items of his jealousy, what made his very soul tremble to think of, was that she should ever in Serle's arms have been wrapped in that sudden blank ugliness of passion. That was his, Savile's, that tearing selfless intimacy.

Freddy Messenger said: "Young Archery has knocked one of his father's chauffeurs on the head, bagged a car and gone after them to Southampton. Come on."

Savile said: "Freddy, what the hell are you talking about?"

His friend looked thoughtfully into his face. Then he said: "I want you to do me a service, Charles."

Savile thought: "He's guessed. Very well."

Mr. Messenger said: "Drive me down to Southampton in your car."

Savile, staring, said: "Of course, Freddy! Now?"

"Yes. I'm frightened for that poor silly kid."

"All right. I'll just say good-night to Serle and Venetia."

Freddy Messenger strode towards the narrow hall leading to the door. Those long, arrogant legs!

As Savile approached the dining-room Serle came out and shut the door behind him. It was a definite, precise moment, the closing of that door between them and Venetia. He looked impassive, preoccupied.

He said: "I'd like a word with you sometime, Savile."

Savile said: "Yes, we'll have to talk. I have to go with Freddy now. But I'll ring you up in the morning."

Serle still stood with his back to the door. He looked impassive, preoccupied.

"Very well," he said. "Then you will ring me up in the morning? Good-night."

Savile said: "I was just going in to say——"

Serle said sharply: "Of course! Sorry!" He moved away from the door, made way for Savile to pass.

Savile, at that consciously symbolical gesture of Serle's of making way for him to Venetia, felt himself flushing. It was impossible for him to see Venetia on those terms, with Serle *making way* for him in the doorway.

Suddenly Serle smiled in a strained way, as though in polite reception of an invisible third person's joke.

Savile turned on his heel and followed Freddy Messenger out of the house.

R. MESSENGER had spoken with Ysabel's maid on the telephone. The girl was distressed and tremulous. Ysabel's maid, Sadie Williams, had been a gallery-girl. She had followed Ysabel's career on the stage with humble adoration. Year in and year out, come wet, come fine, she had waited for Ysabel at the stage-door, for the passing smile of her goddess. And one night the goddess had asked her to come and serve her.

"His lordship," she had told Mr. Messenger, "was *upset!*" She had not told Lord Archery where or with whom her mistress had gone. She had received no instructions not to tell him, but she just hadn't been able to bring herself to, that was how it was. He was hatless, and had come in laughing. That was what had upset her most. "He looked," she told her good friend, Mr. Messenger, "as he always does, so ready to be happy, that I hadn't the face to . . ."

So all she had told him was that her mistress was

not going to the theatre that evening. He had stared. He had said: "Bilgeworthy luck!" Then he had said, with great dignity, the extraordinary words: "Sadie, I must thank you for your unfailing courtesy and kindness to me." And he had given her what felt like a five-pound note, which she had dropped, so surprised she was. Then, as he was going out of the flat again, he had suddenly turned about and, before she could stop him, had rushed into her mistress's bedroom, had thrown himself on his knees beside the bed —it was rumpled, her mistress had been resting that afternoon, and she hadn't yet had time to remake it— and, with the tears streaming down his cheeks had sobbed: "O Lord, I can't stand any more—I don't want to harm any one, but I *can't*!" Then he had dashed out of the flat, leaving her trembling. She had heard him shouting: "Taxi! Taxi!"

Seabright next. Young Raphael must have let himself into the house very quietly—usually, he slammed the door, all doors—for no one heard him come in. But, once he was in, the whole household and maybe most of Berkeley Square heard him soon enough. Mr. Havelock, who was asleep somewhere upstairs, heard him. In his shirt-sleeves, he leant over the banisters and looked down at Raphael.

"Whatch?" said Mr. Havelock.

"What?" yelled Raphael.

"Whatch matter?" said Mr. Havelock.

"I want Seabright!" roared Raphael.

"We want Seabright!" sang Mr. Havelock, and then he must have slipped on the stairs, for his head vanished from above the banisters amid a series of noises.

Seabright took his time. He emerged slowly. His lordship was in the front hall, the street-door behind him wide open.

"Your lordship called me?" said Seabright. He wasn't used to being yelled for. He was passing by

Raphael to close the front door, and he was meeting Raphael's eye with strong disapproval, when an extraordinary thing happened.

"'Ere!" said Seabright. His lordship had him vigorously by the scruff of the neck.

"You pimp!" said his lordship. Not as a joke, but —unforgivably.

"Pimp!" sighed Mr. Havelock from his invisible bed on the stairs. "Good old English word, pimp. Should be used more."

Seabright, his back forcibly held to Raphael, writhed.

"You'll hear more of this," he said. "I won't 'ave it, my lord."

His lordship shook Seabright. He said: "Now, you nasty old man, a word with you."

Seabright said: "Vulgar abuse to a servant who can't answer back! You'd best lie down a while before dinner, my lord."

Young Raphael snarled: "You'd treat me as though you thought I was an English gentleman, would you—while all the time you despise me as a dirty Jewboy. When you're on top of a Jew you treat him as a dirty Jewboy and when a Jew is on top of you you flatter him by treating him as an English gentleman. You hate Jews in your hearts, don't you, you conceited money-grubbing Gentiles? Listen to me, Seabright. For the purposes of this conversation I am not Lord Archery, I am myself—I'm just a lousy Jewboy about to wring your lousy Gentile neck unless you answer my questions."

"Hear, hear!" yelled Mr. Havelock. "Dirty little Jewboy. And so's his father. All Jewboys."

Seabright said: "You're not yourself, my lord. You'd best lie down a while before dinner. And Mr. Havelock."

"Mr. Havelock," yelled that gentleman from above, "is drunk. Onward Christian So-o-ohldjers . . ."

"*He'll* get the sack," said Seabright viciously, "at last."

Young Raphael's beard tickled his ear. He said calmly: "Now, you withered little snake—where's my father?"

Seabright had a feeling that the other servants were watching. His position was peculiar. He tried to wrench his coat-collar away. He tried.

"Where—is—my—father?" yelled Raphael.

"Boy wantch his old father," Mr. Havelock's voice explained dismally.

Seabright thought it better to tell him. . . .

"Who with?"

That was another matter. Seabright had instructions on that point. He was never to conceal from Raphael when Miss Fuller was with his father. All the same, the position was peculiar.

"Who with?" roared Raphael.

"Boy wantchish old father," Mr. Havelock's voice explained dismally.

Seabright let him have it straight: "Mr. Gore-Cramer, a lady I don't know, and Miss Fuller." Seabright presently admitted to Mr. Messenger that by this time he was so worked up that he had snapped "*and* Miss Fuller. . . ."

His lordship let him go quickly enough at that and made a dash for the still open doorway.

Seabright said: "If you are going out, my lord, you will require a hat."

Raphael suddenly turned and strode back to Seabright. Seabright had known him as an infant in arms, but he could still be surprised by him. Young Raphael was red to the roots of his golden hair. He stammered:

"I'm sorry, Seabright. Please shake hands. Let's in future go on pretending that I'm not a dirty Jewboy and that you are the perfect English servant who respects his betters. And don't tell his lordship about

Mr. Havelock's having fallen with a crash off the water-waggon."

Now the most extraordinary thing about Raphael was the way he could look at you. And so Seabright shook hands. Then, hatless and all, Raphael rushed away—down the steps into the square and to the right towards Charles Street. Seabright watched him until he disappeared round the corner, his hair all over the place. A sight he looked.

"He's gorn to the garridge," thought Seabright.

"But he can't 'ave a car," thought Seabright. "'Ow can 'e have a car? His lordship 'as said he's not to 'ave a car, on no account.

"All the same," thought Seabright, "there'll be two cars in the garridge, the big Renault and the Daimler. . . .

"And that Renault can Go," thought Seabright. "Wicked-looking thing. . . .

"But the garridge'll be locked," thought Seabright.

"And if the garridge isn't locked," thought Seabright, "there'll be Tomlinson there. And no one can catch Tomlinson by the scruff of the neck. . . .

"Drat Tomlinson!" thought Seabright. "There's that Renault!"

The great touring Renault, looking like a gigantic toad, swiftly passed the high walls and gates of Lansdowne House. Raphael's fair hair flew over it like a small bright flag. The car disappeared into Berkeley Street. Seabright walked thoughtfully round to the garage, which was in a mews off Charles Street running parallel with the west side of the square. The doors of the garage were closed-to, but not locked.

"Tomlinson?" said Seabright.

"Tomlinson!" said Seabright.

Tomlinson was sitting on the floor in a corner of the garage. His hands were tied behind him with a white silk handkerchief. There was a folded banknote between his teeth. Seabright thoughtfully un-

folded it. Tomlinson said he had a bump on his head.

"Feel it," said Tomlinson.

"Five pound," said Seabright thoughtfully.

"I earned it," said Tomlinson. "'Ere, let me up."

"You'll get the sack," said Seabright thoughtfully.

"'Ow do you make that out?" said Tomlinson bitterly. "'E comes in 'ere and I says, 'Evening, me lord,' and 'e says, 'Tomlinson,' 'e says, 'I wants Annabel Lee'—that's what 'e calls the Renault—and I says, 'Sorry, me lord,' and then 'e says, 'Tomlinson,' 'e says, 'I wants Annabel Lee at once,' and I says, 'Sorry, me lord, but my instructions is this way.' And that's all I knows."

"This five pounds," said Seabright, thoughtfully, "is dirty money, Tomlinson."

"Orlright, 'alves," said Tomlinson.

Seabright's mind could at times move very slowly. It was quite an hour later that he bethought himself of Mr. Messenger's request earlier in the evening that he should ring him up. . . .

By the time Mr. Messenger, who seemed that evening to be powerfully affected by the charms of silence, had leisurely told Savile the bare outlines that Seabright had given him of young Raphael's movements, the clock by the speedometer showed a quarter-past ten and they were well past the suburbs on the Southampton Road. Savile had scarcely listened to his friend's leisurely and disjointed narrative.

He was lucky, incredibly lucky. That kept on occurring to him. He thought: "I am happy. I am happy at last." But everything seemed very muddled, clouded. The faces weren't distinct, they were all mixed up together. He tried to concentrate on Venetia, to recreate her face, that lovely large-eyed face, the curly gleaming hair. To his profound astonishment he awoke in a few minutes to the realisation that he was thinking of something quite different, something trivial,

unimportant, like Serle's making way for him in the doorway. . . .

They would "talk" to-morrow. . . .

Serle, dark, impassive, preoccupied, had said: "Savile, I'd like to have a word with you sometime. . . ."

What was there to "have a word with" *about?* Things had just happened, that was all. Things over which nobody had any control. . . .

Serle always had "control" over things. That, to Serle, was the point of being Serle. Lord and owner of his face, captain of his destiny. . . . God, how Napoleon must have bored his friends! Those frantic ungovernable men who are convinced that they can govern. . . .

Freddy Messenger said: "He must have started off at about eight o'clock. Seabright seemed unable to give me the exact time. He what's called hummed and hawed. He must have had a couple. . . ."

"He'll be there by now," Savile said of Raphael. He vaguely wondered what had passed in the young man's mind as he raced down to Southampton. Was he angry, mad angry, or wretched, helpless with misery? Probably just blank, completely blank, and not unhappily blank, just puppy blank. You often were, once you had decided to send your mind on the crazy quest after self-torture. You waited for the worst with beautiful patience. And how efficient, calm, precise you were when you wanted to hurt yourself, how quickly and clearly the mind worked. How clearly he, Savile, could see Serle now, look into his mind. . . .

Savile said: "Freddy, what the devil does the boy think he's going to do when he does get to the yacht?"

"Probably," said Mr. Messenger, "he hasn't thought about that. One doesn't, somehow. . . ."

"You mean, one's so jealous that . . ."

Mr. Messenger said: "You know, it's the most extraordinary thing—that obsessing urge to seek out,

disinter, collect, follow up clues with which to form a chain of proof that will *not* show one that one's jealousy is absurd and unfounded, but that it is founded on fact. . . ."

Savile said: "Yes. One wants to *know*. . . ."

"And a hell of a lot of good knowing does!"

Savile thought: "Dear old Freddy! He's telling me not to be a prize ass about Serle. . . ."

It was a moonless night, very bright with stars, very dark on the land. The head-lamps carved for themselves a misty way. And all the little flying things of the night flew into the misty way to worship and to die.

Did Serle love Venetia?

A formal, matronly sort of voice said wearily in his ear, as though she was tired of saying it: "So much of what is called 'love' is really only habit."

Did Serle love Venetia, or was she a habit—a sedative for his selfish energy? The point was, *could* Serle love anybody but himself? Obviously, he couldn't. But what the hell did "obviously" mean in a world where we know absolutely nothing of anybody else?

Suddenly, and without troubling to find out whether or not Freddy was listening, he began telling him about Venetia and himself. He did not mention Serle's name. . . .

He was still talking when they swept into the broad street that runs into Southampton.

Freddy Messenger suddenly said: "She won't marry you unless . . ."

Savile slowed down the car. His heart was beating fast. He felt he was about to hear something he had often been about to tell himself but had as often been afraid to.

"Unless what, Freddy?"

"Unless you can somehow prove to her that she will be of more use to you than she is to Serle."

That was the terrible thing he had always been

expecting. It was, in a completely unanswerable way, a condemnation of himself. And it had always been hanging over him, always, in a more or less degree, in all his relations with people. It was at the back of his failure in all his intimacies. People didn't feel that they could be of any use to him, that he needed them. And he did, he needed them terribly. But he couldn't somehow give that impression in any profound way. They saw a hardness in him where there was only hunger. There was some kind of unnaturalness, artifice, in his manner that put a mask on his childishness, that would not let any one come near him.

Southampton was as quiet as a village. The jetty was deserted. Its emptiness stared at them from the light of the head-lamps. "Annabel Lee" was there, more than ever like a mammoth toad, drawn to one side by a small shed. Savile drew his car up beside it and switched off his lights. The two friends looked about them. Below, the water lapped the stones.

FREDDY said impatiently: "There must be some one about."

"It's late," Savile pointed out.

They shouted. . . .

The night was very dark on the water. Faint lights hung low in the distance. Savile wondered where the *Celadawr* was lying. He had not been on board her for years. But Freddy Messenger, in his vague capacity as *liaison* officer between old Townleigh and his newspapers, was on the *Celadawr* most Sundays through the summer. He said that she would probably be at the same anchorage as that at which Savile had last seen her. The old man did not like the sea. The *Celadawr,* one of the largest private yachts afloat, put out from Southampton Water at the most twice a year, to Cannes and to Deauville. For the rest, Lord Townleigh used her as a house-boat. The *chef* was the captain of the yacht *Celadawr.*

Freddy Messenger, his voice hoarse from coughing, said: "There's usually a little man called Bamber who hangs around here at nights. Bamber. You might give a yell. My voice isn't so good at the moment."

Savile raised his voice. "Bamber! Bamber!"

It somehow sounded an idiotic name, shouted like that into the superb and serious night. The whole affair suddenly struck Savile as quite pointless. For some reason the name Bamber seemed to underline its pointlessness. All that would happen would be that they would find themselves in a "party" on the *Celadawr* and he, Savile, would drink too much out of boredom. The old man would be delighted to see them, in many ways he was a naïve old man, he was always delighted when any of his friends showed they had need of his company by joining one of his "parties" unasked.

A small man in a cap emerged from somewhere in the darkness. He seemed a very decent little man with a mild "educated" voice. Savile did not listen to Freddy's conversation with him. Somehow he found it difficult to rouse in himself any interest in young Raphael's affairs. They were, in a way, too like his own. And what could one do for the boy? It was as though young Raphael and he, Savile, were two soldiers of a great host that was marching towards the promised land, marching in the face of all manner of tribulations, and Raphael, wounded in some skirmish, was continually falling behind, so that at first he was pitiable and then, as one's own troubles grew, became irritating. *Chacun pour soi et Dieu pour tous.* Common-sense. . . .

What was so singular was, that every one who was trying to reach some beautiful goal was generally wounded in some silly skirmish miles before, so that when at last he came to his beautiful goal he was not fit, he was too hurt and tired, to be worthy of it. . . .

Freddy Messenger turned his head and said:

"Bamber here pulled young Raphael out to the yacht about two hours ago."

He would have liked to ask Freddy: "How can one man help another man?" And he would have liked to ask him: "Can any one build his happiness on the unhappiness of another?"

Carefully they descended slippery steps into a skiff. You could not see your hand before your face. The water sang against the stones, against the boat, to itself, with small minor notes.

It was Dostoievsky who had cried: "Can any one build his happiness on the unhappiness of another? Happiness is not in the delights of love, but in the spirit's highest harmony."

How impossible, how unattainable, how artificial even, those words sounded when oneself and not Dostoievsky said them! As artificial as "Love thy neighbour as thyself." One could hear that command thundering down the ages. "Love thy neighbour as thyself," and in the beginning no doubt people had listened in bewilderment and despair and fear of hell everlasting, but gradually the thundering command became so usual a noise that people didn't even hear it, as the stranger acclimatised to a great city ceases even to hear the din which at first disturbed him. Did one love one's neighbour as oneself? One not only did not, but one somehow didn't want to, either. There was something fantastic, unreal, affected, in the idea. These words that glowed with divine grace, what use were they to small suffering men whose very organs stood between them and even a desire for the light? "The spirit's highest harmony." If only, one might just as well say, if only worms had wings! But what beauty there was in Dostoievsky's words, what promise of happiness, the music of infinite tranquillity! And one couldn't even grasp the idea in it, it was so immense, so transcendental, it was a star so immense in an infinity of immensity that the senses were appalled and one

finally had to turn away with a prick of impatience, even as one sometimes does turn away from thoughts of the size and distance of the stars.

"Slap, slap, slap!" went the skiff against the invisible water. Still a good way ahead swung the lights of a yacht. Riding over the darkness came voices, laughter, the husky whisper of a ukulele.

"Freddy, I haven't been listening. What's the news?"

Raphael Archery, on going aboard the *Celadawr,* had told Bamber to wait for him. Bamber had settled himself down for a long wait, he knew his young gentleman. But Lord Archery had returned in less than half an hour, calling "Good-night" behind him into the saloon and almost overturning the skiff by jumping into it. He was in high spirits, laughing and talking at the top of his voice, but Bamber hadn't been able to make anything of it and presently had fancied that his lordship was talking loud for the benefit of the company on the yacht. One of the ladies had come out of the saloon and had called over the side to him to come back, but young Raphael had whispered savagely to Bamber "Pull away, pull away!" and had not answered the lady at all and she had gone into the saloon again. However, Bamber hadn't pulled more than two hundred yards when young Raphael told him to turn back to the *Celadawr,* leave him on board and not come back again, as he had suddenly decided to spend the night on board. Bamber had asked him "What about the car?" but young Raphael had said vaguely something like "Burn it, boil it, sell it." He told Bamber to draw alongside very quietly as he wanted his return to surprise the saloon. The last Bamber had seen of him was leaning over the side, but well away from the steward's pantry and the saloon, watching him pull away. Bamber had seen him standing there for almost as long as he had seen the lights of the yacht.

As the skiff swung alongside Freddy Messenger called out: "Green!"

Quite ridiculous Freddy looked, Savile thought, a long shape with a bowler-hat on his head balancing in a skiff.

A steward appeared, looking inquiringly at them over the side and then, making Mr. Messenger out, smiling broadly.

"Why, sir, a surprise visit! His lordship will be pleased! They're still in the saloon, sir, as you can hear, and I'm just on my way to order some scrambled eggs——"

"Green, is Lord Archery here?"

They were on board now. The voices and the laughter from the saloon were almost deafening. Savile, looking vaguely over the side, was struck by the look of gentle concern on little Bamber's upturned face. *What* a pleasant man. . . .

"On board, sir? Why, his lordship's been gone these two hours—and with Bamber here," Green added, looking severely down at Bamber as though he simply could not understand what Bamber was about not to have given the gentlemen that information already. But the gentle Bamber, intimidated though he looked, was about to make his proper answer, when Mr. Messenger said quickly: "All right, Bamber. We won't keep you long. Maybe Green here will see to it that you have a drink. . . . Then, Green, you haven't seen Lord Archery again since you saw him go?"

"But I've been telling you, sir, he's been gone these——"

"Who's out there? Come in, come in!" boomed old Townleigh's voice from the saloon.

Freddy's looks made Savile uncomfortable. Freddy was very white, and the two red stains on his cheek-bones stood out brutally. All the same, he looked stern and handsome. Savile had never before thought of

Freddy as "handsome." Green looked uncomfortable too, staring up at him.

Freddy Messenger said: "Green, go to Lord Archery's cabin and see if he's there. If he's not, have a look round and find him—get Hutchins too, if he's not too busy—and then come into the saloon and tell me quietly. Come along, Charles."

Their welcome, Savile put it to himself, was nothing if not hearty.

"Charlie, Freddy! You delight my old eyes. Green, wine! You are welcome, my friends. You will judge between Gore-Cramer and me. Now I have never liked Gore-Cramer much, but I am not without benevolent feelings for the whole human race. Therefore I say to him: 'Come, spend a night on board my good ship the *Celadawr*. Two pretty ladies are coming.' And he comes. Decidedly he comes—and cuts me out with both of them. Have some champagne."

The old story of the "sociable" jealousy of Great Men that makes for conversation. . . .

The table around which they sat was littered with glasses, bottles, fruit. Gore-Cramer, Savile recollected later, never said a word. His chair drawn a little way from the table, a glass in one hand, he sat with an arm round a pretty red-haired girl on his knees who divided her time between giggling at old Townleigh opposite and staring dumbly into Gore-Cramer's tight, brick-red face. The only words Savile heard her say were: "You lie like hell." She said them without any feeling, but just formally or with a bright smile. They obviously meant, "I don't agree with you," or, "You are mistaken." When old Townleigh said to her, "Kathleen, you are beautiful to-night," she said, "Darling, you lie like hell." When Ysabel said, "Now, Kathleen, it's your turn with the ukulele. You play so well!" she said, "Darling, you lie like hell." Every now and then the red-haired girl looked fixedly at something on the table, and Savile thought she was going to scream,

but she only bit her lips. She was introduced as "Lady Vernot" or some name like that, and Savile vaguely remembered having read something about a "Lady Vernot" in the newspapers, either that she had been married or divorced or gone bankrupt or written a book. . . .

Old Townleigh was not in the least curious to know how it was that they had thought of joining his party at this unlikely hour. He took it for granted that, having heard he had gone down to the *Celadawr,* they had instantly wanted to come too. He loved to be needed by people, did old Townleigh, but he would grow very impatient with them if they tried to hide the fact that they needed him.

Old Townleigh said to Freddy Messenger, who had taken a chair beside him:

"Freddy, we must get rid of Warrington. He gets worse and worse. That was a disastrous article of his to-day." Old Townleigh boomed round the table: "Did any one see that article on roller-skating in this evening's *Mercury*?"

No one had. No one ever does. Why are "articles" written? No one knows.

Old Townleigh boomed on: "The man writes an *excellent* article on roller-skating, tracing its history from Noah to this day. The silly ass! All the public wants to know about a thing is how much it costs and the circumference of the blasted wheels!"

Every moment Savile was expecting Freddy to disconcert them all with his cough, but somehow—so Savile found himself thinking with a queer tender tremor—an inside sternness in Freddy seemed to have dismissed the cough for the time being. That night Savile's long friendship with Freddy Messenger flowered into love, the patient and tender and upright love that one man has for another.

Savile hadn't, after all, found it half so difficult as he had expected it would be to accommodate himself

to the "atmosphere." And, curiously enough, that was Ysabel's doing. Her hair disordered, her eyes very large and bright, this was one of Ysabel's wild and beautiful nights. On other nights, in other company, Ysabel would look cold and imperious, formal and indifferent, and in the *Sketch* or the *Tatler* she would look innocent and grave. But to-night she was wild and beautiful.

Savile found himself sitting in a chair beside her. She had surprised him from the moment of his entrance by the complete friendliness of her smile—not only surprised him but also relieved him of a weight at the back of his mind which, he only now realised or rather only now admitted to himself, had been vaguely worrying him ever since that "unpleasantness" at Old Townleigh's party at the Savoy.

She said: "Have you missed me at all?"

He said what it was proper for him to say.

She said: "Charles, let us be friends."

"Lady Vernot" stared intently at Savile. Her mouth looked as though she had been slashed in the face with an axe. Her eyes looked as though she had not noticed the blow. When she smiled her gums enjoyed publicity. He decided that she must be "literary" and had lovers for conventional reasons.

Ysabel said: "Kathleen, don't drink any more. You're buffy."

She said: "Darling, you lie like hell."

Old Townleigh must have his joke. He must, as they say, "register" jealousy. He boomed: "Keep off, Charlie! Why can't you leave Ysabel alone for once and give her a chance to like someone else? Have some champagne instead."

That went on for quite a while. How we allow ourselves to be fascinated into indolence by the indomitable, the insolent, the tireless boringness of Leaders of Men! How, by charming ourselves with the consolation that we are anyhow "nicer" than

they are, we continue to concede to them limitless opportunities of boring us! How do we *stand* it! "The race is to the swift, the battle to the strong." Let them win the race, let them win the battle . . . if only they will sometimes keep their mouths shut!

Ysabel, who had quickly acquired that abrupt unselfconsciousness, which is the mark of a certain circle of society, of making no bones whatsoever about letting any one who cared to look see in whom she was interested at the moment, peremptorily cut Savile off from any general conversation. He seemed to find, lurking in the depths of those glorious eyes, an increasing and impersonal laugh. It gave him an uncomfortable feeling that she somehow knew something about him that he himself had no idea of at all.

"I know," she said seriously, "that there's something going on, that you and Freddy are up to something. It's not our pretty faces you've come to see, that I'm sure of. And Raphael has been out here too."

Savile had been wondering why on earth Freddy hadn't yet told them that Raphael was on board. It must be that he was waiting for Green to bring news of him. But where the devil, his eyes asked Freddy's, was Green? They had been in the saloon at least fifteen minutes. . . .

Freddy said to old Townleigh: "By the way, the man who pulled us out told us that Raphael was here——"

"Was, but is no more!" old Townleigh cried boisterously. "Tell them, Ysabel. The boy disdained us. Even Ysabel could not hold him. He came, he drank, he went——"

Ysabel said huskily: "And *conquered,* darling!" Her eyes, looking past Savile at Freddy, were serious, sensible. "I've never seen Raphael so sweet as he was to-night. So—well, nice and normal. Wasn't he, Jerry?"

Old Townleigh, banging his fist down on the table, cried: "I agree!"

Ysabel's eyes became quite expressionless as she glanced at old Townleigh. Then she said, but as though the words she was using were stupid and meant nothing: "We liked him so much that I went out and called to him to come back, but he wouldn't."

Old Townleigh sighed: "Ah, he's a good boy! A very good boy—just a trifle over-enthusiastic, that's all." His fingers caressing his magnificent beard, he smiled across at Ysabel. But she looked back at him with that abstractedly serious look of one who has made up her mind to take the next remark not at all in the trifling spirit in which it is made.

"Ysabel," smiled old Townleigh—rather pathetically, Savile thought, "is the boy still in love with you?"

Ysabel continued staring abstractedly at old Townleigh as though, it seemed to Savile, she had accepted her boredom in the old man's company as an inevitable item of a certain "phase" of her life and therefore spent her time with him in thinking of other things. Ysabel was one of those people who, once they have accepted such and such a thing or person as part of a "phase" of their lives, will resign themselves to all irritations arising from that "phase" until the moment suddenly comes when they decide that the "phase" has passed. Then, that decision once made—one can never tell exactly when or exactly why, just as one cannot tell why they ever "let themselves in" for the "phase" at all—nothing, neither entreaty nor persistence, can make them renew, "put up with," even the smallest item of the dead "phase."

Old Townleigh seemed a little disconcerted by her silence. His eyes glowered sulkily. He said to Savile:

"Charlie, so great is your influence with our little Ysabel that she has also become infected with the virus of domestic generosity. She has almost persuaded me that I have been perhaps just a leetle bit too

exacting with my Raphael. I shall have a long talk with him to-morrow——"

Freddy Messenger had suddenly risen from the table. He was at the door when he turned round to say sharply: "If I were you, I wouldn't wait till to-morrow." Then he went out. Savile concluded that Green must have beckoned to him.

"Lady Vernot" laughed.

Old Townleigh, from one side of him and Ysabel from the other, stared at him.

Savile said: "He's on board."

Old Townleigh said: "But Ysabel saw him going!"

Savile said: "He came back."

"Lady Vernot" said: "You lie like hell."

Ysabel said huskily: "So *that's* why you and Freddy are here!"

Old Townleigh said: "What's that, Ysabel?"

Ysabel said: "Savile and Freddy have come to take care of Raphael."

Savile said: "We saw him in London earlier in the evening. Freddy was a little worried. . . ."

Old Townleigh said: "Take care of Raphael! But where is Raphael?"

Savile said: "On board, Jerry."

Old Townleigh said: "This is madness!"

He towered up from the table. He stared round the table. His eyes were as heavy as oily water.

He said: "I'll get to the bottom of this. This is madness!"

Freddy Messenger's voice came from the passage.

"Jerry, Savile, out here a moment!"

Savile said: "Freddy asked one of your stewards to have a look round for him."

Old Townleigh looked imperiously round the table and strode out. Savile, following him, looked round at Ysabel. She was smiling at him faintly, and again he had that uncomfortable feeling that she knew something about him that he himself had no idea of at all.

"What is it, Ysabel?"

She stared at him. Her full round breasts stirred under her champagne-coloured dress.

"Nothing, dear."

Gore-Cramer suddenly said: "I fancy that boy Raphael is a bit weak in the head. He'll do himself in one day."

Ysabel said savagely: "Shut up, you beast!"

Savile went out. In the passage, old Townleigh's eyes were bent with menace on poor Green. Savile thought: "He is afraid, he is afraid!" Freddy was away down the passage, walking towards a closed door at the end. Those long arrogant legs!

Green was saying: "I looked everywhere, my lord. But I never thought of your stateroom until as I happened to be passing I just thought to try the door and——"

Old Townleigh looked angrily at Savile, then strode after Freddy. His great bulk filled the passage, quite obscuring Messenger at the far end.

Savile said: "Go on, Green."

Ysabel was at his shoulder, he could feel the warmth of her body against his arm. She whispered: "I can't bear it."

Green said: "The door is locked inside, sir. I could not get any answer at all from his lordship. I tried for quite a while, sir."

Savile stared after the two men, now together by the closed door at the end of the passage. He could feel Ysabel's breath behind his ear. Her hair had the same smell as a cleanly woman's bedroom in the morning.

"Charles, what is it, do you think?"

He said: "We'd better stay here. No good all going."

But even as he said the words he was moving up the passage. He said over his shoulder: "Stay where you are, Ysabel."

"Must I, with those beastly people?"

She looked a child, her flaming curly hair falling over her forehead, staring at him with tragic bewilderment. She whispered: "You know, I don't feel it concerns me at all. I feel it ought to—but how can it—how am I to blame for *not* loving some one, just as how am I to blame for loving some one?"

He joined the two men at the end of the passage. Freddy was saying: "No, Jerry. The shot would have been heard."

Savile said: "Have you both gone crazy? How could he have a revolver with him? People don't carry them about."

Old Townleigh seemed to have only a very vague idea of what he was doing. He was leaning his weight on one massive outstretched hand which was sprawling against the door. As Savile spoke he turned his head. His face was the colour of sleeping-car linen as you see it through half-open doors on your way to the breakfast-car. He said: "There's a revolver in there, and Raphael knows where it is. That blackmailer Stravolgin always swore to get me when he came out of prison, and he's been out some time now." He dropped his hand helplessly from the door, and said to Messenger: "Call to him once more, my dear Freddy. He will take notice of you." He turned dull heavy eyes to Savile. The sweat running down his cheeks somehow brought out his Jewishness.

Savile said: "What about the windows?"

Freddy Messenger said: "They're those thick what-d'you-callems that you can't see through. Breaking in the door will be easier."

Old Townleigh said wearily: "Very well, stand out of the way."

The door flew open before his massive shoulder touched it. Young Raphael stood facing them with his forehead puckered.

He stammered: "What is it? Why can't you leave me alone?"

The two men in the passage could see nothing of the stateroom. The old man's bulk blocked all but the upper half of Raphael's face. Raphael was frowning sulkily.

He stammered: "I wasn't within a mile of it. And you go hammering at the door!"

And then he vanished altogether. Old Townleigh, his arms round his son, was sobbing: "My boy, my boy, what a fright you gave me!"

"Nothing like the fright I gave myself!" came Raphael's smothered voice.

Savile and Freddy Messenger retreated cautiously down the passage, backwards, as though before the majesty of reconciliation.

Freddy whispered: "How I love a real, hearty, damp reconciliation!"

"Believe me," Savile chattered nervously, "we're not going to be let off as lightly as this. He will show us those tears or bust."

And even as he spoke old Townleigh twisted his great head about and boomed: "Where are you going to? Come here and let us talk to this silly boy."

His beard shone, his eyes shone, his face shone. Tears rained down his cheeks. But his nose rose imperiously above them, his eyes flashed proudly through them.

Freddy said: "Blessed are they that weep."

Savile said: "Let nothing stop you, Jerry. Weep all you can. You have been waiting for a Good Cry ever since Raphael was born."

"That is true," the old man said gravely. "I weep for joy."

"Well, I wish you wouldn't!" stammered young Raphael.

Old Townleigh then burst out into a tremendous laugh. Then, very suddenly, he became silent, sat heavily down in the nearest chair, and stared hungrily at Raphael.

On a little table, littered with journals, was a small automatic revolver.

"Freddy," said Raphael in a strained voice, "I've found myself out at last. I'm one of the clowns."

Old Townleigh began chuckling, then blew his nose and said seriously: "Very well, you are one of the clowns. Good. I am one of the lions. And Charlie and Freddy are something or other. In fact, we are all in the same circus created by Nature to amuse itself——"

"Nature!" said Raphael passionately. "Nature is a bloody fool! It begins by arousing in us all a need to love and be loved—and in nine cases out of ten it can't satisfy it."

Savile picked up the small automatic from the table and stared at it thoughtfully. He wanted not to look at young Archery.

He heard Raphael saying—to him!—bitterly: "Yes, it's loaded all right! There was nothing to stop me."

"Before I forget!" old Townleigh said suddenly. "Listen, you boys! Not a word of this silly business outside this room."

And they all knew that Raphael would tell every one he met for ever after. . . .

"As I sat here," he began, stammering, "it suddenly seemed to me that life was beautiful. . . ."

Savile went on staring at the automatic in his hand.

Old Townleigh said: "Be a good boy and put that cursed thing away."

Young Raphael said with dignity: "When it came to the point I couldn't do it. For one thing, I was terrified—and for another, life seemed to me beautiful." He added: "It doesn't now."

Ysabel said huskily: "It's long past the time when somebody should have made a joke. . . ."

She was in the doorway, wild and very beautiful. Raphael looked at her in a very self-possessed way.

"A joke?" boomed old Townleigh. "Certainly,

Ysabel." He addressed Savile and Freddy Messenger:

"My friends, let me present the future Lady Archery."

"Like hell you will!" Ysabel said huskily, indifferently.

A grin began spreading over Raphael's face. He was looking at his reflection in a mirror. He murmured: "Just a clown!"

Old Townleigh boomed: "What, Ysabel, you won't marry my boy?"

Young Raphael, still looking at his reflection, murmured: "Just a bilgeworthy clown! Well, I'll be a clown. Man, know thyself! And I'll marry like a clown."

"Darling," Ysabel said huskily, "does that mean you are letting me off?"

She was staring at Savile. . . .

Freddy Messenger said mildly: "Ysabel, what about that joke you promised us?"

"A joke?" boomed old Townleigh. "It is I who will make a joke. Have some champagne."

BOOK FIVE

IT was the afternoon of a bright-coloured day, it was an afternoon that was a credit to time, it was an afternoon on which visitors to the outer suburbs were greeted by their hostesses in the garden, whereupon they cried: "Just like being in the depths of the country—and yet so near London!" But what shall we say of London itself, the sinful and majestic city that sits in the rare sunlight with the indifference of a wicked dowager after a good luncheon? And a dowager with a proud taste in dress is she, suffering fashions grimly, for left to herself she would be very well content year in and year out to wear the same musty skirt with the dusty green spots, the stately parks of London. And there it is that they all are this afternoon, the upper-classes walking leisurely to and fro, the lower-classes listening to orators or lying on their backs, and the middle-classes . . . alas, the middle-classes cannot very well be there, for they are busy being the backbone of England, in offices, in banks, in Parliament.

She came to him with a quivering laugh.

"Oh darling, happy day, happy day!"

The sunlight poured itself into the room like hock into a greenish glass. And her eyes had a violet glint.

"Venetia, that awful note of yours—weeks ago! Reading it just here—and how I hated this sunlight then!"

"Charles, the things we do!"

"Coward!" he laughed. "That's why."

"You don't know," she said, "what a lot of talking

I'm going to do. I've always promised myself some ever since I was so high."

Now he was in a most peculiar state, asking himself at intervals of every three minutes: "What is happening? How beautiful everything is!"

"Oh Charles, and this is your flat——"

"Not really. I'm never here."

"Then it's what is called in French a foot in the earth—or isn't it? Manly to a degree, I'll say that for it. Books and a bottle of brandy. Charles, how happy you must be up here in the clouds and the telephone ringing all the time and beautiful strange voices asking: 'Is that Mr. Charles Savile, the novelist? Because if so he writes so exquisitely about women that I would please like to be a sinful temptation for him at his earliest convenience.' Oh darling, and you run right off and do it, I'll bet you do, and afterwards you look noble and depressed, asking yourself introspective questions like: 'What does life *mean?* What are we here *for?*' Aspiring questions."

Savile's flat was on the top floor of a house in Mount Street. The sky, which usually looks so small from London, looked quite a big place from his windows. From the sitting-room windows you could see across Carlos Place into the wide open spaces of Grosvenor Square, and far away you could see the marching myriads of Oxford Street and the proud and castellated roof of Mr. Selfridge's shop. "The Romance of Business," how romantic it looks from a mile away in hazy sunlight! And many other points of interest you could see from the sitting-room, but all that was really nothing at all, that was a second-rate view, whereas from the bedroom windows you could look down on Mount Street Gardens, which is spread like a bright green handkerchief between the high red backs of the houses thereabouts and is the prettiest place of its kind or of any kind in London by a long way. Of course you can walk across it in a minute, but

what a silly thing to do. There are no policemen there, only pigeons and children and old gentlemen, and every one who walks through wears a smile that lasts a little way up the busy streets beyond, like the taste of oysters through luncheon on the 1st of September. A man who committed suicide there, under a tree, was found with a smile on his face, and as it came out at the inquest that he was an escaped lunatic he was judged to have committed suicide while temporarily sane. It is a most beautiful place. The gates are opened at 8 a. m. every morning and are closed at 7 p. m. every evening.

It was the afternoon of the day following the affairs on the yacht *Celadawr,* and she had come to see him because he had asked her to that morning on the telephone and she had answered: "Yes, of course!"

And because she was coming to see him he had immediately put down the telephone-directory in which he was about to look up Serle's number, he did not ring up Serle according to his promise, for what was the use of ringing up Serle, what had he to say to Serle and what had Serle to say to him, what nonsense all this talking was, really, really, *really!* Give them half a chance and those confounded politicians would talk your head off. Besides, he was a serious man, one of the world's workers, he had no time to waste on idle telephonings. And so he spent the morning smiling to himself because of the laugh in her voice on the telephone, and when at last she came she instantly did the right thing by his expectations, for what did she do but throw her hat away as though she hated it?

They sat together hand in hand and had nothing whatsoever to say.

She searched the room with slanting mocking eyes, looking along her eyelashes. Her eyes rang silver bells in the silence. Her legs were curled beneath her, and she stroked her ankles with two fingers of her right hand. Her ankles were like a child's. Her finger-nails

enchanted him, they were pink but not too pink, they were as pink as the hands of Swan Vestas. He kissed them, and found they smelled like pear-drops. They talked of young Raphael, she telling him how he had rung her up first thing in the morning and told her all about the doing on the *Celadawr*.

"Poor, poor Raphael!" she sighed, but failed completely to look as though she was thinking of him. "But how unhappy he'd be if by any chance he didn't have something to be unhappy about. Oh dear, I shall marry that fellow one day. . . ."

"You will marry me," said Savile, very gravely.

"Darling, yes? Honest to God?"

"Honest to God."

"Charles, will you really? And go through with it and all?"

"I promise."

"My generous, open-hearted, honourable and delicately hopeful lover! How happy I am! Darling, very soon?"

"Venetia, for God's sake don't laugh!"

"I'm not *laughing!*"

"This is the most serious moment of my life. Now please listen very carefully. Will you really marry me?"

"Marry *you?* Darling, are you crazy!"

"God, you *were* laughing at me!"

"Will *I* marry you? *Me?* He asks me, *will* I? Well, will I *not!*"

"Venetia!"

"But can you imagine my not marrying you!"

"Oh God, couldn't I, haven't I!"

"So stupid, darling! And you a writer, too!"

"Venetia, tell me you will again! Tell me!"

"Oh, you're crying! Charles!"

"Well, you're crying too. . . ."

"Crying for happiness, the princely one! Oh, I certainly love you! Such is my irrevocable decision.

Do you love me? Answers should be marked with a cross on the top left-hand corner of the envelope. A cross, darling—how stupid you are!"

"Keep your eyes open, Venetia! I want to look into them."

"Darling, I can't!"

Her eyes danced with laughter.

"Oh Charles, your mouth! All lip-rouge. But that was an imperfect kiss last night, wasn't it?"

"Oh, you thought so too, did you!"

"But it established contact, darling. . . ."

"I assure you, Venetia, that that kiss last night was a serious disappointment to me."

"But, Charles, the first is always a not-so-good! Don't you know *that?* It serves merely to establish contact between two people who haven't established anything together before."

"Venetia! How do you know so much about it?"

"Don't be stupid, darling!"

"I'm not being stupid!"

"My little man! Such magnetism! What I don't know about magnetism!"

"Venetia!"

"Yes, darling. You know, taxi-stuff—coming home from parties."

"God, the cads!"

"Yes, darling. But it was no use. No life-force. No sex-appeal."

"Of course you have! The infernal cads! Teeming with it."

"Well, I'm really glad to hear you think so. But they didn't——"

"Good God, *they!*"

"Yes, darling. Bigger and Better men, Strong and Silent men, Older and Charming men, Nearan and Dearah men, Debonair and Damn-you men, Proud and Cynical men, Officer and Gentlemen men, Chaps——"

"Venetia, for pity's sake! I can't bear it!"

"But nor could they! My beauty, I admit, often left them speechless—but otherwise I was no go."

"Now that's enough, don't tell me any more about the cads!"

"But there is no more! Angel, what are you doing up there?"

"I'm trying to forget your past. How lovely your hair smells!"

"That reminds me, it's filthy. I must have it washed."

"Was it very long before you had it cut?"

"Oh sweetheart, must you ask that? I'm so sick of hearing women who are almost bald anyhow, saying: 'Oh, yes, my husband was so upset at my shingling it—it used to fall right down my back.' No, I never had tresses, only bits and pieces."

"Venetia, listen. Last night when I kissed you I thought for a moment that I didn't love you——"

"Oh, I'm going! I see, I see! Let me go, let me go!"

He couldn't look at her but with profound astonishment, incredulity, joy. It was incredible that she was there. The tall slender girl. The beautiful friend.

"Silky-brown eyes! Princely one! In fact, Prince Charles!"

"But how did I come to be a Prince?"

"So stupid! Because I'm a Royalist!"

"But that doesn't make me a Prince!"

"Almost an idiot! I'm a private Royalist, darling. Ordinary Royalties are no good to me. I make my own."

Her eyes danced along her eyelashes into his heart.

"You're sad!" she said. "Oh dear!"

He was thinking: "Is this really happening? Is she really here in my arms? Oh, she's too beautiful for me, too perfect!"

"You're sad, you're sad!" she said.

Her loveliness bewitched him, so that he laughed.

"No, I'm not," he said. "Where shall we live when we're married?"

"Jersey," she said.

"Jersey?"

"Well, anywhere! Does it matter?"

They looked at the view. . . .

Her slender curving body, the warm living gold of her curly hair, the tender line of her throat, the deep bright pools of her eyes in which a grown man fell with a delicious unending fall. . . .

"A perfect view!" she said.

He looked at the view. To his consternation, his eyes filled with tears.

"It can't be true," he said.

She stared at him. Her eyes were mysterious.

"You're not looking at the view!" he said.

"Bother the view!" she said. She stared at him.

And he saw that she was wiser than he was.

They were standing together at the open window, and the white clouds rolling by over their heads.

"You see," he said miserably, "it's the old story. No confidence. . . ."

"No confidence in *me?*"

"Oh, no! In myself. . . ."

And he saw that she was wiser than he was.

Her eyes gleamed with a dark mysterious smile. Something beautiful was about to happen. Something too beautiful.

He cried sharply: "No, Venetia!"

Her eyes gleamed with a dark mysterious smile.

"Fat-head!" she said gravely. "I kiss you on the forehead."

He stood there like a madman in a trance. He stood there transfixed, absorbed, in the dream and the whirl of love. Things were happening. He was as gloriously helpless as a man in Heaven. There was a silken sound, and the clothes fell from her body like petals

from a shaken rose. The lovely shining garment of her skin! She balanced on one foot and wrenched off a shoe. She dwindled adorably. Thoughtful she looked. The fever and the ecstasy of love! The bliss!

"These shoes are tight," she said.

"Idiotic to wear tight shoes," he said.

She dwindled adorably. A stocking curved in the air near by him, and he inhaled the fragrance of her skin.

"Where's your forehead?" she said. She had to stand on her toes. He felt tall, stalwart. For it has been scientifically proved time and again that a tall woman without shoes makes a man of a short man.

"Years ago," she said, "I promised myself that if I ever had a lover I would begin by kissing him on the forehead."

The question is: "Do dreams ever come true?"

The answer is: "How silly to dream!" Nevertheless, since men are silly, the question persists. The answer, after due thought, is: "By God, they do!"

The loveliness of women! How strange it is that all men do not see it! How strange it is that some men avoid it! Science blinds them. Art misleads them. Philosophy lures them to false gods. Clubs make them fat, politics silly, commerce arrogant, golf bald, bleary and speechless. . . .

She lay beside him, looking at him along her eyelashes. And he saw in their gleaming depths the profound and timeless and unknowable jest without which the ages of melancholy would weigh too heavily on this our earthly life. In an excess of adoration he caressed and kissed her in complete abandon.

But his kisses seemed to him vain futile things, silly butterflies in the soaring heavens of his hunger. He saw the universe in a beautiful body . . . and he could not possess it, could not possess it all. It is a curious maddening thing, that a man cannot possess all of one beautiful body. There is always something he cannot

possess. The craft and the malice and the trickery of love! Why can't a man possess *all* of just one beautiful thing? Such a little thing for soaring hunger to ask for! The perilous phantom of love, the laughing cheat!

A shadow swiftly darkened his eyes. She saw it.

"Charles, what is it? Tell me at once!"

"I can't help it," he said helplessly, "I just can't help it!"

She stretched out her long shining arms and pulled his face down to hers.

"You've got to help it," she whispered. "Now, Charles!"

"It's never been . . . you've never been—like this before? Never? Venetia, by God tell me the truth!"

And his dark eyes were frantic with the pain of the past. . . .

She held him close. "Oh, is that *all!*" she whispered.

"Venetia, for God's sake! Swear!"

"I'll swear," she whispered, "before God and all His angels. You silly fat-head!"

And she began crying.

"Silly fat-head!" she said.

"Venetia, my dear one, what a cad I am!"

She smiled through her tears.

"And will be again," she said.

He kissed away her tears. He bowed over the bride of his dreams. "Marriages are made in Heaven." The luxury of loving the finest! The limitless frontiers of love that is blessed!

She sighed. His hunger mounted to the sky and descended to the shadows. Philosophers say that love is largely made of curiosity. That is true.

When he looked upon her face again, her face was still. So life goes. Her hair was a warm helpless splash on the pillow, her eyes were closed, her long dark eyelashes curved down her cheeks like silken lances at

rest. He kissed her with subtle kisses in the soft places of her shoulder and her throat. She opened her eyes and smiled into his intent watching face.

"Do you know," she said, "what I was thinking of while my eyes were closed?"

"Me," he said.

He was awed by his delight in her laugh.

"I was thinking," she said, "that love is like falling into a deep hole and finding a mountain there and sliding down it on one's spine. And there's a flutter of sparrows somewhere too. . . ."

"You're tired, Venetia. You'll be better soon."

Her forehead nestled into the hollow of his shoulder, and her exquisite arm encircled his neck. He watched over her with reverence and wonder. Her hair tickled his cheek, and his position was uncomfortable. She slept. He wondered how any human being could be so beautiful. He wondered why her upper lip and the tip of her straight nose quivered as she breathed. He wondered why her hair smelled like a bathroom in a cherry-orchard. He wondered how her throat came to be so soft and yet so firm. He wondered why her finger-nails smelled of pear-drops. He wondered if her cheeks were flushed with love or health or rouge. He wondered whether she would awake if he moved, for he was infernally uncomfortable and would get cramp in a moment. . . .

He moved a little. He managed to extricate himself from her embrace. He gave her head a gentle shove away from him. He sighed with relief, and gave himself up to meditation. He found that he could not sincerely look on life but with a large and pessimistic tolerance. The mischief and the trickery of life! What an artist in discouragement! We live for years and years, we meet countless people, yet how few of us ever meet one among them to whom we are so rightly adjusted that we shall be intimate with them without a degree of impatience or shame or contempt!

And we know that as we go on trying, searching, but we say: "Well, what can I do? *What,* I ask you!" Yes, regret is like a mountain that arises at our eager feet when we are very young, but we do not know that the name of the mountain is regret, we think it is a grand and lovely mountain, and so we climb up it, we climb and climb, thinking: "Ha, this is life!" But as the years pass by we have more time to look around us, and we look back down the ragged slopes and lo! we recognise the crags of shame and the wastelands of despair and the valleys of humiliation, but we are not very disturbed, saying: "Yes, I have done all those things. What about it? What else was there to do? But what a pity." And we go on climbing the mountain that is regret, for what else is there to do, until the day comes when we are so old that we may not climb any further, and then we sit down on the most comfortable boulder we can find and watch the streams flowing down the slopes bearing our memories along with them, and somehow our memories are quite pretty, much prettier than the incidents that begat them, and that is always something . . . but what a pity!

She was staring at him with warm dusky eyes. He wandered about in them lazily, like a man enjoying a cigar in a warm dusky garden.

"You're not going to tell me, Venetia, that I've been asleep!"

"For a long time, darling. I've missed you."

He kissed her nose. She looked at him along her eyelashes. She looked into him. She looked thoughtful.

"How beautiful love is, Venetia! And how amazing! So different in men and women, so——"

She looked at him along her eyelashes. He was afraid. He made an effort to be wide-awake. Her eyes were as blue as the sky within a circumference of seven million miles around the Evening Star as seen

from the Malvern Beacon any evening in the first week in July.

"In a man," she said, "love is like a hammer——"

"Oh, not a hammer!"

"A hammer, darling. It beats and beats inside him, and presently it doesn't beat so hard, and presently it doesn't beat so regularly, and presently it doesn't beat at all. . . ."

"Light of my life," he said, "I can't agree with you."

Her eyes were as blue as . . . as . . . as blue eyes.

"Whereas," she said, "love in a woman is like an onion——"

"Oh, not an onion!"

"An onion, darling. It peels and peels, it peels for a long time, and then you get to the heart of it, you get to *something*. A man cannot have it all at once, but as time peels the onion he will get so much more and so much more and finally he will have everything. And that is very sad, darling, for hammers can't beat always."

"Oh nonsense!" he said, and he kissed her luxuriously, thinking to himself how marvellous it was to possess a beautiful woman, to possess *all* of her. Only then can one *talk*, only then can a man be himself. . . .

"Darling!" she said.

He looked at her. Her eyes were as blue as fountain-pen ink.

"I must go," she said.

"Go?" he said. "Nonsense!"

He kissed her cheek. The loveliness of women! The cool delicious softnesses. . . .

She sat on the edge of the bed, her feet on the floor, her elbows on her knees, her fingers buried in her curly golden hair. Her curved white back, he reflected, made a delicious line. What is more delightful than to have loved, to be content, to lie smoking a cigarette and staring at a delicious line! What artists we are when

we have loved! No, not artists, art is a fussy business —what philosophers! We contemplate. We meditate. We generalize. We soar. That is the difference between men and women. Women do not generalize, do not soar. A man, once he is appeased, lets his mind hover over the world, he rises to large generalisations. Whereas a woman, once she is possessed, what does she do, does she meditate, does she envisage the world, does she think about anything at all? No! After he has loved, a man becames a soaring eagle in the skies of thought, but a woman becomes a hen. . . .

"Darling!"

He said quickly: "Yes, dear?" But he did not say it half quickly enough.

"I've had a bath—a sort of bath," she said savagely.

"If you had only told me, Venetia, I would have shown you how to work the——"

"I'm going," she said, "and you sleep!"

And she began to dress with her back to him.

He woke up with a start.

"But of course you're not going, Venetia! You are dining with me."

She looked round at him over her shoulder. Her curly hair fell over her eyes.

He said: "Good . . . *God!*"

She whispered: "Charles, why are you looking at me like that?"

He said: "Look here, Venetia, what are you doing to me?"

She stood in the middle of the room, yards away from him on the bed, a long-limbed slender absurdly . . . childish creature. She wore a short chemise woven of the petals of pink roses. Her stockings climbed and clasped her thighs like lovers. Those adorable legs! He thanked Heaven she did not wear garters. She came towards him, slowly. Her eyes gleamed trustfully down at him.

"Smile, please, oh please!" she said. "My darling, my Prince, my angel! In fact, my equal!"

He did not say anything. She passed her fingers through his ruffled hair.

"But, my sweet one, I must dine with him to-night! I promised, you see . . . last night, when he was so —upset."

He turned his face to the wall.

"You'll break my heart," she said, and her voice broke.

He wanted to turn back to her, to look at her, to kiss her, to mend her broken voice, but he could not. Staring into the wall, it seemed to him that his eyes were so heavy that never would he be able to turn them to the world again. And it seemed to him that he had known this was going to happen all along, he had *known*. . . .

From behind him came the sweet silken sounds of her dressing.

"She's dressing," he thought. "What does she care?"

His mind was black with failure. Failure, failure, failure. . . .

"Charles, please turn back to me. . . ."

He felt suffocated with failure. Why had he thought she would say to him: "Now, my darling, my past life is as though it had never been, it doesn't exist from this moment onwards, there's only you and me and our life." Oh, God, what a fool he was! His mind yelled: "IDIOT!"

She said calmly: "Charles, you are tearing me to bits."

An appalling loneliness reared itself beside his love for her. The appalling loneliness had a proud foul face. . . .

Her breath hovered round his head. He took it and twisted it like a dagger into his heart. The sheets he lay on whispered of her long shining limbs and ador-

able passion, the pillows were fragrant with the scent of her hair, his lips were blessed with the honey of her coral mouth . . . and then, Serle, Serle, Serle, Serle, Serle, Serle. . . .

What a pitiless joke! As his heart yearned towards her his mind hatefully saw Serle, Serle, Serle. . . .

"Charles, you are tearing me to bits!"

Her voice trembled, quivered. The dear voice of the tingling laugh, of the kind gleaming eyes. . . .

He whispered to the wall: "You see, I can't bear it—I just can't bear it, that's all."

"Charles, don't say that—don't *think* it—don't!"

"My God, *that* man—that one! It somehow makes it worse. . . ."

She was bending over him with shining entreating eyes. O the proud and timid eyes of the bride, that teach a man to prefer happiness to pleasure! He stared up at her, tormented, silent.

"But don't you *see*!" she said savagely. "I'm yours, yours, yours!" And she caught his lips to hers in an agony of tenderness.

He held her tightly to him.

"Venetia, this is awful! What shall we do about it?"

"Do? Angel, I love you from my eyebrows to my toes, inside and outside, that's all I know."

He held her tightly to him. He hurt her. But she said nothing.

"I can't share you, Venetia! I can't!"

She sobbed: "You're a beastly man to say that—beastly! Share . . . what a word for us!"

"No, listen, listen! I can't bear anything . . . anything casual in this——"

She tried to wrench herself out of his arms.

"Casual! Oh, I see, I see! Casual. . . ."

He held her tightly to him. Her eyes shone savagely in the darkened room.

"Let me go! I hate you!"

"Venetia, listen——"

"I despise you," she said, "for a prize fat-head."

"Venetia, listen. You mustn't see him. You—must—not—see—him."

"Fat-head!" she said. "Idiot! Nitwit! Half-wit! Two of clubs!"

"Venetia, you—must—not—see—him."

"Baby!" she whispered. "What a baby!"

He said reasonably: "I can't quite explain. . . . It's somehow because it's *him,* that particular man. If it were someone else. . . ."

He held her tightly to him. She seemed to be looking into his soul. She smiled a little, queerly.

"Well, Venetia?"

"What a baby!" she whispered. "Even if I never saw him again—you would still be jealous of the past, wouldn't you?"

He said eagerly: "Yes, but that's silly. I'd have to fight that——"

"And what about my feelings and your foul beastly past?"

"It's different, you know it is. . . . Oh, damnation!" He sat up suddenly, shaking her, hurting her. The smile fled from her eyes. "Why did you remind me of that? Look at me, Venetia, look at me!" He stared at her with dark tormented eyes. She could see that he was not thinking of her, only of his own pain.

He said: "Were you ever his mistress?"

She said: "My dear one, my dear one!"

"Venetia, I want to know. I must know."

"And don't you know, my Prince?"

He was silent. His eyes were deep black shadows.

She thought quickly, furiously. . . .

"Tell me," he said.

"I'll tell you," she said at last, "because I love you. But only because I love you. Yes."

His eyes were deep black shadows. She tried to

make him see her. But she had no place in his eyes, she could see that.

"That one!" he said at last. "If only it wasn't. . . . I can't even say the man's name!"

She began to say something eagerly, but he waved her away as though her words had no bearing on the subject.

Then he said savagely: "Why the devil did you tell me? Why didn't you lie?"

"You wouldn't have believed me," she said helplessly. "I thought of it, but you wouldn't have believed me."

"Even that might have been better than this awful certainty that you had been in that man's——"

"Charles, don't!"

He said suddenly: "For a long time?"

"Oh, no!" she said eagerly.

He passed a hand over his eyes. "You're lying," he said wearily.

Suddenly she was very tired too. Her mind would not work. She fought her tiredness. She said: "I don't know what difference it can make, the actual length of time *that* lasted between Peter and me. But it was only a short time, it was and it was and it *was*!"

He said contemptuously: "Instead of lying about the whole thing—which might have been some use—you lie about a little bit of it!"

"I've always been lonely," she said, "so I don't know how to lie. Why should I lie?"

He shouted: "You've been talked of together for years—you're always together now! Last night, tonight. What's the use of telling me that you're not his mistress now?"

She had a sudden queer feeling of shame at her nakedness. . . .

There were tears in his eyes. They ran down his cheeks.

"Oh God!" he said.

She flung herself into his arms, raining kisses on him, sobbing.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm sorry, Venetia."

"Hurting yourself," she sobbed. "Hurting me. . . . You ought to see your eyes when you're sticking knives into yourself!"

He whispered: "It's all right now. But sometimes I go mad—sort of madness creeping up from stomach and hitting me in the head—when I think of you ever having been with that man—as you've been with me to-day."

"Oh, I never was! My darling, how could you think that!"

"I know, I know! I can see just how it happened. . . ."

"Years ago, angel——"

"My God!" he whispered. "The filthy unspeakable——"

"It wasn't all his fault . . . I was silly, so silly! Girls are. I thought I was . . . helping him."

He said eagerly: "And it was years ago—a long time ago?"

"Oh, years and years ago, angel. And he's being fearfully punished now. . . ."

"What did he say after I'd gone last night?"

"Say, Prince Charles? There are things which it would be much better to *say,* things which shouldn't be *looked*——"

"He guessed then, straight away?"

"Well, who wouldn't, with love flying about in the room like a golden eagle!"

"But what did he *say,* Venetia?"

"Nothing, darling—just dark and bitter—and hurt. And so I promised him I'd dine with him to-night. See? I must go, it's nearly eight. You see, he's been expecting this to happen for years, but——"

"For a me to come along, you mean?"

"Yes, a you. You see, he's never been afraid of the ordinary young men——"

"What about Raphael?"

"Poor Raphael. Peter almost got me to marry the poor boy once. You see, Raphael couldn't compete with a Peter in my life, and Peter would feel quite safe about me as Mrs. Raphael, for there'd be no fear of a you waiting round the corner——"

Savile said thoughtfully: "Yes, in his position one would find a Raphael quite convenient. I see that."

Her face was very close to his, her eyes shining, smiling with tears. . . .

"Charles, the pain of things! If one's happy, another's wretched. . . ."

"You hate having to hurt him, don't you?"

"You see, he's *got* nothing but me—politics and me. It'll be a gap in his life. You do see, don't you?"

He said reasonably: "Look here, Venetia, I'll do whatever you say is right. I simply can't bear the idea of the man. . . . I've always hated him, and now I feel almost physically sick at the idea of the filthy brute—taking a young girl and——"

"Darling, those things don't happen quite like that! Girls are so silly, don't you know that? They get flattered . . . you know? . . . and then they get a grand idea of . . . well, of helping somebody by sacrificing themselves . . . so silly and complicated!"

"Anyhow, Venetia, I'm in your hands about this. You must do what you think right, and I'll try and do my share. If you think it would be wrong and unjust to fire him out of your life bang off—well, I'll try to understand and hang on until you clear things up——"

She laughed. She wept. She kissed him. "Generous Prince! Ace-face! And it won't be for long, so you can be yourself again very soon. Angel! How happy we'll be! And you'll see, he'll go of his own

accord. I know him. He'll pack up and go when his position becomes untenable. He's already guessed, you see, that you've happened, and soon he'll know——"

"How?"

"Oh darling, they always do! One shows something, I suppose. Oh, yes, he'll know soon that we're husband and wife . . . and then, you see, because he's a proud man when he thinks of it—like all men, darling—he will clean forget to be hurt and lonely in the new pastime of despising me for preferring someone else to him—for he has never *really* thought I could be such a fool."

He begged her pardon for having made a scene. But she would not let him. He said: "All the same, I can't bear to see you go. I'll ring you up about eleven. . . ."

When she had gone the room was like a dress she had worn. He breathed her enchantment, he dreamed of his life with her. He lay on the bed, adoring its delicious disorder, staring out at the evening sky. There was a dinner he had promised to attend—the sort of dinner one "attended." How ridiculous! There was something idiotic, grubby, about the idea of doing anything, going anywhere, without Venetia. "Princely one! Ace-face!" So generous. . . .

TAYLOR, whose duty it was, since Savile liked to have his flat to himself as much as possible, to await the ring of the bell in the servants' quarters below, at last furtively opened the bedroom-door.

"Saw 'er go hours ago," thought Taylor.

The room was dark. Stars looked in at the window. Taylor sniffed. Perfume touched the darkness with very light finger-tips.

"Goings on," thought Taylor.

"Thought as much," thought Taylor.

"*And* about time!" thought Taylor. "Boring 'im-

self—and me—in the country all those years. At his age. . . ."

"You didn't ring, sir," said Taylor, "but as it's past ten o'clock. . . . Aren't you dining, sir?"

The darkness stirred, sighed.

"I've been asleep, Taylor."

"And no wonder!" thought Taylor. "Nice piece she was, too."

"What time did you say it was? No, don't put on the light."

"Doesn't want me to see evidences of 'is guilt," thought Taylor.

"Just past ten, sir."

"Then drat you, Taylor! I wanted to sleep till eleven. Eleven's the hour, Taylor."

"For supper, sir?"

"Who's talking of supper! For telephoning, man! You can take it this way, Taylor. When a woman loves a man, eleven o'clock is nothing, no more than a trifling incident unworthy of notice——"

"Yes, sir," said Taylor.

"On the other hand, Taylor, when a woman doesn't love the man she is dining with eleven o'clock assumes the dignity of midnight, a quarter-past eleven becomes dissipation, half-past eleven is tantamount to leading a fast life, while midnight is as a headache in the dawn. That is why, Taylor, I shall telephone at eleven——"

"She's got two of 'em," thought Taylor. "Nice piece she was, too. Kept by one of 'em and then comes round 'ere for a bit of fun."

"And that's why I was going to sleep until then, but now you've gone and made a mess of a perfect evening. You're sacked."

"Yes, sir. What would you like for dinner, sir?"

"I'm not hungry. What is there downstairs?"

"I'm afraid, sir, as you didn't order anything . . ."

"Well, go round to the Berkeley and bring me a steak and a bottle of Bass."

"An *entrecôte minute,* sir?"

"A steak, Taylor, not a greasy sheet of brown paper!"

The chimney-stacks of the houses across the Gardens were like squat black fingers among the stars. The spangled sky draped the windows with a stately curtain. "The nice old lady," he thought, "is wearing her lovely old-fashioned spangled skirt to-night." Somehow the thought of the night as a nice old lady wearing an old-fashioned spangled skirt made him realise how happy he was. Hope sang within him like a fountain, murmured like a girl, exulted like a warrior at a feast. He thought of his excitement, his anger, his pain. "Good Lord!" he thought. "Good Lord!" How on earth had he managed to get himself into such a state about Serle? How on earth! "Good . . . Lord!" It was astonishing, incredible. That couldn't have been himself, but some lunatic who had temporarily possessed him. This was himself, now, wondering how he could have been so beastly to Venetia. Divine she'd been, adorable. "I kiss you on the forehead." It must have been . . . well, yes . . . affectation, a sort of affectation, that had made him make that scene. He must have said to himself: "Now is the time to show jealousy. Up, boy!" Whereas he wasn't actually the least bit jealous of the man. At this very moment she was dining with him, and he didn't give a damn. He couldn't be jealous of Serle now if he tried. He did try . . . and all he could think about him was that we all come a cropper sometime and Serle had come *his* at last. And he deserved it, if any one did. Still, that was over. Life goes on, the past is a fading face. How adorably she had put up with him. "Fat-head! Nitwit! Two of clubs!" The darling! He could see her gleaming eyes, and the truth awash in them like clear water in a blue cup. The beautiful friend. One woman will use the truth as though it was an armoury of sharp

weapons, and another will use the truth as though it was a garden, plucking flowers therefrom and bedecking herself and her lover with them. He smiled, thinking of the first words he would say to her on the telephone. She had given him her private number, of which but very few mortals had the secret, for it rang beside her bed, whereas the one in the directory was a lesser demon crying out in the bowels of the house and demanding of poor Trellis the wearing operation known as I-will-put-you-through-sir. He would say to her on the telephone . . . well, he would make her laugh. That lovely, tingling laugh. "Darling Prince! Oh angel!" So generous. . . .

It was delicious to light a cigarette at eleven o'clock, delicious to delay picking up the telephone. He walked about, he thought of the tales he would write. He was a serious man, one of the world's workers, and he had other things than women to think of. For instance, this business of writing. Writing was going to blazes, that was the top and bottom of the matter. A lot of sterile clever women and anemic young men. Very sarcastic, all of them. Never Obvious, but sarcastic. They called it "Satire," a sort of vintage word for common-or-garden sarcasm. "Mr. Blob's (or Miss Slob's) novel is a really excellent satire on modern theatrical (social, political, anything you liked) life. In parts it is uproariously funny, but that is not to say that Mr. Blob (or Miss Slob) does not genuinely and sincerely . . ." Sarcasm! And why were they so sarcastic? George Moore had written somewhere that sarcasm in a writer . . . or painter? . . . was due to the artist's discovery that he could think more profoundly than he could write. George Moore said that embittered the artist. But why did that embitter him? George Moore, wise man, great writer, did not explain why. Explanations are the curse of good prose. Sarcasm is the curse of modern literature. He would change all that. No more sarcasm—or satire, or what-

ever they called the rubbish. "The artist is he who searches out his own intolerable secrets." Who had written that? Middleton Murry, probably. It sounded like Middleton Murry. It sounded like some one explaining Russian literature to pale young men with baggy trousers and eager girls with muddy shoes.

As he went to the telephone he caught sight of his face in a mirror. He was grinning. Portrait of a Man in Love. He was a serious man, a man of letters . . . a moment ago thinking of Middleton Murry . . . and here he was grinning like a lad telephoning to his girl from a call-box.

It was three minutes past eleven.

He picked up the telephone. . . .

Glorious is the telephone! Let us praise the telephone! The Church's one foundation is, etc. . . . But what about the Y.M.C.A.? Where would the Y.M.C.A. be without the telephone? It is right to love horses, our dumb friends. They helped us in the war. But look what the telephone did in the war! Glorious is the telephone! It helps the sick and ailing, it succours unfortunate women. A grand thing is the telephone! And various are its charms and delights. Who does not know those nights when the telephone is not merely "convenient," when it is gay, when it is fanciful, when it is generous? Nor are its gifts of the vulgar sort, but they are as delicate as the scarves of painted ladies hovering between "embosoming trees" beneath the moon. Let us praise the telephone, its charming and subtle fancies. It will whisper into the shy youth's ear of the maiden's bright eyes and of the dimple in her round cheek, and it will confuse the poor lad utterly by telling of that tender disarray which he shall not behold until he and she are wedded, God willing. Glorious is the telephone! In all England it is but the one thing left that reminds us of the graces and the colour of the eighteenth century. Woe to the lover who has no telephone! He shall be deceived. But who

shall tell of the relations between the impatient lover and the telephone, of the tricks that the confounded thing does play on him, how it is as subtle as a serpent, as fertile as a Queen Bee, as busy as an ant, telling him of his lady's delights in her privacy, asking him to inhale the tender fragrance that clings to her movements as she comes out of the bathroom and lies upon the bed and stretches out her white arm to lift off the receiver, begging him to finger her dear nightgown of *chiffon,* which is a common French name for the breath of pearls and through which, as she lies at ease in the sovereign privacy of her bedchamber, the hapless fellow must look upon the soft white breasts that he may not touch and the delicious shadows that he may not explore. Therefore, let us praise the telephone.

Waiting with the receiver to his ear, he saw her in her room, restfully set within it like a figure in a casket softly lined, like a girl in her bedchamber by Fragonard. She sat with her back to him at her dressing-table, and one arm was raised above her head, floating there as white and graceful as a sea-bird, whilst with one hand she plied an enormous powder-puff as it pleased her. Glorious is the telephone! And as he heard the receiver being taken off he could see the slender outstretched hand and the fine curved nails thereof, that were as pink as the heads of Swan Vestas and smelled of pear-drops.

"Venetia?"

"Miss Vardon has not come home yet, sir."

"But I . . . thought she was dining at home!"

"Miss Vardon is dining out, sir. Who is calling, please? This is the maid."

"Thank you, there's no message. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir."

Glorious is the telephone. . . .

BUT, after all, she had said nothing as to where she was dining. Nothing at all. It was merely that he had somehow taken it for granted that, as he had come upon them the night before dining at Brook Street, they would be dining there to-night too. Somehow it hadn't occurred to him that they would be dining "out." He recalled her exact words, "I must dine with him to-night." Of course, that meant he was taking her to dinner at some restaurant. "Dine with him." But wouldn't she have said, if they were going out to dinner somewhere. "I must let him take me out to dinner." No, that was absurd, one always said: "I am dining with So-and-so to-night." And then one went to the man's house or the woman's house and dined. . . . Again, suddenly, he caught sight of his reflection in a mirror. He stopped, staring. One went to the man's house—or flat—certainly, flat—and dined. And then, of course, one couldn't be home by eleven. Naturally. People hated being left at eleven. A lot of trouble had been caused that way. . . . "Good *Lord*!" he thought, but comically, quite comically. "Women are . . . amazing! To-night of all nights . . . when she's got the whole of London to choose from . . . to-night of *all* nights . . . she goes to the man's flat! Don't they *ever* know the sort of thing that disturbs a man!"

He was quite certain that they weren't at a restaurant. Serle wouldn't be in the mood for a restaurant to-night. He didn't see them in a restaurant. He saw them sitting in some room, neither dressed for the evening, she without a hat. . . .

He picked up the telephone-book. SA-SAN SCO. SEG-SEL, SEN-SET. . . .

Victoria. . . . xxxxSerle, Rt. Honble. Peter Antony, M.P. 44a Whitehall Ct., S. W. 1.

Mayfair. . . . xxxxSerle, Dame Muriel. 78 Chesterfield St., W. 1.

Of course the place at Whitehall Court would be his office . . . a sort of combination office and flat. Very convenient for him to dine there when the House was sitting, or to sleep there after a late debate. . . .

He could see them there, in a smallish untidy room, neither dressed for the evening, she without a hat. . . .

He could see her, without a hat, listening.

A voice said to him contemptuously—*contemptuously*: "Bit late in the day to worry about what those two do together, isn't it?"

The long, long intimacy. . . . It somehow got into the bones, it became part of somebody, a long intimacy like that. And he outside it by years, a stranger. . . .

He could see them there, in a smallish untidy room, she without a hat. As they had been time and again; time and again, for years and years. . . . She listening to Serle. Large-eyed, curly-haired, so slender, so generous. . . . Listening with attention in case he should be "hurt." Hurt! Good . . . *God*! Hurt —*that* man! Why the hell shouldn't he be hurt!

Her friend Serle . . . one of the world's great ones. . . . "It'll be a gap in his life," she'd said. Gap!

It seemed to him that he had paced miles and miles of carpet by the time he allowed himself to ask for Venetia's number again. It was half-past eleven.

He prayed to God for Venetia to answer, to hear her voice. "Buzz, buzz. . . ." He prayed: "Oh God, don't spoil it all!" He prayed: "My whole life depends on this moment. Oh God, don't spoil it all!" There was no answer.

He poured himself out a brandy-and-soda. His mouth felt scorched with the number of cigarettes he had smoked since speaking with Venetia's maid on the telephone. But he needn't smoke after midnight. She would be ringing him up before then. He could hear her, a little breathless from running upstairs to her room: "Oh angel, such a state I've been in these last

two hours! I couldn't get away. . . . Oh darling, this state of affairs must be put a stop to. . . ."

His vice, the vice he had never grown out of—of imagining words into other people's mouths. . . .

He saw himself in the mirror. He said: "IDIOT!"

But what an idiot! To worry because she was not home by midnight. Who *was* home by midnight? Only centenarians, and not they if they could help it. If he hadn't been alone he would barely have noticed that it *was* midnight. Actresses were just leaving their dressing-rooms on their way to supper. Ysabel and Raphael. People were just beginning the evening. Only the fact that he was a serious man, one of the world's workers, kept him from being among them . . . instead of making a fool of himself over nothing by himself.

Nevertheless, he would take no risks this time. And she, of course she would not ring him up, for fear of waking him. He kept away from the telephone until a quarter-past twelve. The extra expenditure was two inches of brandy and four cigarettes.

As he heard the receiver at the other end being taken off he knew that he never had had the shadow of a doubt but that she would answer this time.

"Venetia!" his voice trembled idiotically.

"What's that? Who d'you want?" It was a man's voice.

As he gave the Exchange the number again, and before he had waited a second for an answer, he knew that there would be none. . . .

And it seemed to him that if he had been a different sort of man, an entirely different man in every way, Venetia would have long since been at the other end of the telephone. . . .

WHEN he came to look back on this night Savile could not recollect, could not imagine, how he had passed those hours. He must have been insane.

There was a bottle of brandy. . . .

He walked about. His knees ached with walking. He said to himself: "Where's your sense of humour, my young friend?"

Venetia and Serle. He saw them together, in a smallish untidy room, she without a hat. . . .

He tried her number every half-hour until half-past one. Then he did not try again. It didn't matter. He was dead tired, his knees ached like the devil. He went on walking about, drinking, smoking.

He had always been afraid of going mad. Just as some people were afraid of getting cancer. Serle, for instance. He wondered if he was going mad now. He thought. "I must be going mad."

But his mind was so clear.

"I've never been so logical in my life," he thought.

His mind was so clear that he could see through walls. He could see into hearts. And he had no place anywhere. He would never have a place anywhere. There was not a woman in the world who did not know another man more intimately than she knew Charles Savile. That must be his fault . . . But what *was* the matter with him?

What was that terrifying remark Freddy Messenger had made? Good Lord, only last night! *She won't marry you unless you can somehow prove to her that she'll be of more use to you than to somebody else.*

Oh, bilge to *that,* anyhow! Bilge! She knew he needed her. . . . That's why she had been so divine that afternoon. To give him confidence. . . . Venetia! Venetia!

Venetia and Serle. . . .

But why was he fussing, what was it all about?

What did it *matter*? Everything passes, everything is trivial, everything is interchangeable. There are a lot of people in the world, a devil of a lot. Why was he so weak . . . so subservient to his thoughts about one person? Why did he allow himself—all of himself—to be imprisoned in thoughts of one person, why couldn't he see the world, the act of living in the world, apart from one person?

"Because I can't!" he suddenly shouted.

He thought: "I'd better sit down. This walking about's bad for the nerves. . . ."

He made an effort, and lay down, and closed his eyes. On the sofa where they had sat hand in hand. "Answers should be marked with a cross on top left-hand corner of the envelope. . . . So stupid, darling!"

Behind his closed eyes sentences began to form in his mind. Exactly what he would say to her tomorrow. Reasonable, quiet sentences. One by one, they came together in his mind. Sensibly, without self-pity, he would tell her that he had had a terrible night. He would explain why. "You see, Venetia, what it does to me—that sort of night, of waiting—is to strip me of all my vanity—the natural vanity of every human being. You see? And without that natural vanity of his . . . a man's naked . . . unforgivably naked to himself. He's not a man or animal . . . but a *thing*!

"And there's another point, Venetia . . . a man like me has always hoped for a woman like you . . . the beautiful friend . . . but he only realises that when nights like last night come along . . . it's only then that he realises he's been hoping for you all his life, that it's only that hope that's given him the courage to go on living in this damned lonely world. And suddenly you're not there . . . you're just NOT there . . . and he wishes to God he'd never met you at all because now there's nothing more to hope for, nothing. . . ."

Tears of self-pity were welling up behind his closed eyelids, forcing their way through. . . .

If she hadn't so adorably seemed to love him, so adorably given herself to him, so adorably enjoyed herself and him . . . like the daughter of a goddess! If, if, if . . . if only she'd been cold, ordinary. . . .

"I kiss you on the forehead."

He thought: "It is because some one seems to have loved one *utterly* that the pain of losing her becomes almost a madness. It isn't on her having loved one but on her having loved one *utterly* that despair fastens. That won't, that can't happen again. Only one person in our lives can give us that utter feeling. We can't be loved utterly more than once. We can't be loved in the way we want to be loved more than once in our lifetimes. That won't happen again. Never."

He had to get up, to walk about. . . .

There was a moment when he found himself staring at an old service revolver. He laughed. "Just an idiot!" he thought.

Never again would she tremble in his arms. "Princely one! Oh angel!" By God, never again! He didn't want her, at *this* cost afterwards. It wasn't worth it. It simply was not worth it. The eyes of life, the eyes of life, the eyes of life! "Oh, bliss! Say 'bliss,' say 'bliss'!" The loveliness, the *fun*! He saw everything of her, every feature and every line, everything of her face and body and mind, every inflection of enjoyment and passion and weariness and sadness and laughter. "Angel, what *fun*!" It simply was not worth it.

The bottle of brandy was empty. He found some beer. . . .

Pacing about, he tried to make his mind a blank. He had never in his life been able to make his mind a blank. People said to him: "Oh Lord, yes—I'm a great sleeper! Right away. You just make your mind a blank." He had never been able to think of

just nothing. He would fall asleep thinking . . . round and round. . . .

He stumbled against the table now and then.

"No man should get like this," he thought.

Her fault. He would explain to her. "Without his natural vanity, Venetia, a man's left naked—unforgivably naked to himself. He's not man or animal—but a thing!"

Oh God, if only it wasn't *that* one, that Serle man! The malice of it! The one woman in the world he wanted . . . attached—yes, attached—to the one man whom he somehow couldn't bear to think of. . . .

He *knew* the man. That was the funny part of it, how well he seemed to know the man. Serle was violent and selfish and arrogant and all the tiresome Napoleonic things. But he wasn't sensual. He, Savile, might be, probably was, sensual—but Serle was almost certainly not, he almost certainly was what was called a "bad lover." "Bad lovers" . . . inheritors of the earth, vessels of the race, lords of the home . . . "bad lovers." They were extraordinarily unaccountable, dangerous men. No desire to please, none. Lucky that, though, for they couldn't if they wanted to. Lucky for them that 90 per cent of women weren't sexual. But conceited . . . inheritors of the earth, vessels of the race! They made up for their inability to please by an extraordinary conceit of their manhood. The blind life-force. Blind, all right. God, the swine! Their inability to please never occurred to them—but they utterly despised men who sought to please women. And they profoundly distrusted passionate women. They might fall in love with, marry, enjoy a passionate woman—but they profoundly mistrusted her passion. There must be something wrong with her somewhere. If the woman saw that, she might try to curb herself, to seem cold. Then the man was exasperated, infuriated. She was putting on airs. Strong measures were taken. The only husbands who raped their wives

were "bad lovers." A good lover knew that the loveliest woman in the world who doesn't want one is less desirable than the kitchen wench who does. That was the one beautiful point in the tiresome legend of that ass Don Juan. But the inheritors of the earth were sexually too conceited to make love. They somehow confused "making love" with "lust" and "sex-plays" and despised the lot. They despised as "tricky" or "effeminate" men who sought to please. What the devil did a man want to *please* women for! They were "normal" men, plain men. The earth was theirs, and the fruits thereof. They were the bulwarks of all the grubby religions that began with Martin Luther. They were the backbone of England, the jawbone of America . . . the clowns of France. Poor France. She ought to have tried a grubby religion or two. Grubby religions pay.

And women loved them . . . the "bad lovers," inheritors of the earth, vessels of the race. Women loved them. No, but women got used to not loving them. It came to the same thing. . . .

Just as Venetia was used to Serle. "Leave a gap in his life. . . ."

That smallish, untidy room at Whitehall Court . . . she sitting there, without a hat, Serle talking, talking, dark and domineering and *articulate* . . . and *needing* her. . . . Oh, he could show he needed her, all right. And she listening, helpless, large-eyed, sad . . . being *needed*!

And because Serle hated and feared him, Savile . . . and because Serle was the sort of man who knew nothing and wanted to know nothing of what he contemptuously dismissed as "sex" . . . he would, like all men who despise "sex," think he could regain her by forcing her physically. . . .

The tearing bitter knowledge Serle would instantly have on seeing Venetia that evening of her relations with him, Savile! "The gap in his life" opening out.

Savile digging the gap in his, Serle's, life. Men somehow felt those things. Unlike women, they were seldom jealous of the wrong person. He would have seen the afterglow of passion swimming about in her eyes. And Serle wasn't, "until he thought of it," proud. "Like all men, darling." He wasn't concerned with the detachment of pride—until that detachment occurred to him to be a convenient mental attitude to adopt. The blasted politician. And to wrench him, Savile, from the depths of her eyes, from her body, to assoil her of what he would contemptuously tell her was a passing *béguin* for Savile . . . what wouldn't he do? Was there anything that cad wouldn't do—to fill up that opening gap in his life!

Her damnable helplessness! Her "not hurting" helplessness. . . .

He could see them, her. . . . After all, she was accustomed to him, he was not strange to her. He, Savile, was the stranger.

She was used to Serle. . . . "Years ago," she had said. "Oh, years and years ago!" He had wanted to believe that, he had eagerly made himself believe that she hadn't let him touch her for years. It would have been *impossible* for him to hold her in his arms if he hadn't believed that all that had been over years and years ago . . . it would be absolutely impossible for him even to look at her if he thought for one moment that this Venetia, this grown-up one, had ever been Serle's mistress. . . .

And yet he hadn't believed her, he hadn't believed that "Years and years ago." Men didn't let a woman like Venetia go. . . . And she was one of the weak ones.

That weak, vicious helplessness! Such women ruined men by their infernal "niceness," rotted the hearts of men, killed hope. . . .

Vile words came crowding to his lips. He said them one by one, slowly. He threw them at her face, to

make her look beastly. But they would not stick on her face, they fell from her. The beautiful face. She smiled all the time.

"Silly fat-head!" she said. "Two of clubs!"

He fell on his knees by the sofa on which they had sat hand in hand and sobbed for shame and prayed for forgiveness.

He loved her because she was the portrait of all the good and dear things, all the generous and gracious things, all the finenesses and kindnesses that he had longed for all his life. That was why he loved her, that was why he would always love her. . . .

"Venetia," he sobbed, "why did you see that beastly man to-night?"

He loved her as a man loves her with whom he can act out his dream of life instead of dreaming out his life.

Her smile rang in his head, her gleaming kind eyes, her shiny curly hair. She rang in his head like a song. . . .

> *. . . I had a beautiful friend*
> *And dreamed that the old despair*
> *Would end in love in the end. . . .*

The telephone-bell was ringing. It rang and rang. Still on his knees by the sofa, he turned his head to the insistent shrilling. He felt empty, emotionless, incredibly tired. And *dusty,* as though with the dust of the ages. He felt he could not say a word. It was a quarter-to three. What was there to say?

There is somehow the compelling authority of complete detachment from earthly laws about the ringing of a telephone-bell in the watches of the night. One must either run away from it or answer it. He knew all the time that he would answer it. He knew that he wanted, expected, a miracle. All his life he had been expecting a miracle. As he lifted off the receiver he seemed to hear in advance every word, every inflection

of voice in the conversation he was about to have. He would begin by being . . . polite . . . and then grow resentful, bitter. And all the time he would be longing for her to convince him that his resentment was silly . . . that miracle! . . . but the more she tried to convince him the more bitter he would get. And then she would be too tired to go on convincing him any more. . . .

Of course she would be tired. . . .

"Yes?" he said coldly.

"Hallo? Is that Savile?"

Savile began laughing helplessly. . . .

"Hallo, hallo? Is that Mr. Savile's flat?"

Savile laughed helplessly. Life was too silly, too senseless. We try to make a story of it, and we try to give ourselves parts in the story . . . and it answers with an idiotic shout or by waving a meaningless piece of string.

"Yes," said Savile. "Oh, yes!"

"This is Serle. Have I woken you up?"

Savile was still laughing, helplessly.

"Oh, no. I was wide-awake. How are you, Serle?"

"I say, what's the joke?" Serle's voice was sharp.

"It's all right, Serle, I'm not laughing at *you*."

"Are you in bed?"

"Bed? I feel I never want to go to bed again."

"Wait till you're my age, my young friend!"

Savile began that idiotic laughing again. "I say, Serle, is it your idea that I should hang on to this telephone until then or are you going to tell me now why you are ringing me up?"

Serle's voice was pleasant, pleasantly authoritative.

"Come, Savile, be friendly!"

"Why, of course I'm friendly!"

"Well, you sounded as sour as a quince."

He had loved that when she had said it. So it was a "family" joke. . . .

He said: "Look here, Serle, you're the one man in the world I want to see."

"That's better. But why didn't you ring me up this morning—or rather, yesterday morning—as you promised?"

"Oh, that's a long time ago! Besides, the night's the time. . . ."

"I agree. I thought there might be a chance you hadn't gone to bed yet and was ringing you up to come out and have a glass of wine somewhere——"

"Yes, but where?"

"Well, I'm ringing up from the Berkeley. I happened to be passing by, and——"

(On his way back from seeing Venetia home.)

"——and thought of you. Let's talk."

"But where can we go to? It's three."

"Oh, crowds of places! London flows with champagne at this hour. Leave it to me."

"Well, a former Home Secretary ought to know!"

"Decidedly. Coming?"

Something seemed to snap in Savile's head.

Serle said: "Hallo! . . . Well, coming?"

Savile said: "No. I've changed my mind."

Serle said: "Look here——"

Savile said: "Good God! And good-night."

He slammed down the receiver—and, somehow, instantly forgot Serle. He realised that he simply could not stay the night in his flat. He simply must go out, walk. He began dressing furiously. He dressed with a celerity that would have astonished and disgusted the elegant Savile who had played tennis at Lacey Moat. He vaguely stumbled now and then. Then, with his hat crammed on his head, he waited by the door. He swayed a little, and pulled himself together. He was waiting for the telephone-bell to ring again. He knew it would.

"She'll be tired," he thought. "Tired, tired, tired, tired. . . ." Jealousy. . . . The only absolutely and

irredeemably vulgar thing! The sin against the Holy Ghost. . . .

Admitting the absolute vulgarity of it was somehow a great help, it released his thoughts. . . .

"Can't be finicky to oneself," he thought.

There was a queer beastly excitement in thinking horrible things about her, in sliming her over with dirty thoughts, in dancing nakedly beyond the further frontiers of misbehaviour. He was sorry now that he had sent Serle to the devil. He wished he could get him back. He wanted half-an-hour's talk with Serle. He'd like to get things out of him. He'd like to use Serle's caddishness to get all he could out of him. He'd like to *know* about Venetia . . . about that "years ago." Serle would let him know somehow or other . . . how long it was since Venetia had been his. . . .

The bell uttered a peal. He went out, slamming the door behind him. The bell cried out. As he went down the stairs its cries followed him, despairingly, fainter, fainter. "Charles, you're tearing me to bits!" He had to stop half-way down the stairs to decide whether he could actually *hear* the bell ringing in his bedroom or whether it was just ringing in his head. And he couldn't decide. It went on crying out. "The damned thing!" he thought. He was sweating. "I can't, Venetia!" he said. "I *can't*!" He took the last flight of stairs in two or three leaps. What was he doing, why was he throwing away his happiness? He was at the street-door. He stopped, staring at it. He wiped his face. IDIOT was written across the door. "Good . . . *God*!" he said. But what an idiot! "Fat-head! Two of clubs!" He would go back, talk with her, tell her what a fool he'd been . . . accept everything, live out his life. How beautiful! She was waiting, lying in bed, the telephone against her breast, the receiver pushing back the

golden curly hair from her ear, waiting, wondering. He could see the gleaming eyes, sad, ready to smile, wondering. "Oh angel, where have you been?" He would go back.

There was a loud knock on the door. Rat-tat-tat! Rat-tat-tat! Bad-tempered, where-the-hell-are-you-all knock.

Savile flung open the door viciously.

Serle said: "What the devil do you mean by talking to me like that?"

Savile was surprised to see that it was raining. Just drops. . . .

He said: "I was just going out for a walk. Come on."

Serle stared at him. His face was in the shadow of his hat. Savile shut the door behind him. It was raining very slightly.

Serle said: "I've got a taxi here."

"We don't want a taxi."

"Well, I've had the thing from Whitehall Court and I find I haven't a penny on me. . . ."

Savile gave him some change. Serle was sober. Serle was always sober. He wondered if Serle had ever been drunk in his life. Probably not. Thinking about his career. His blasted career. Savile felt helpless. "I'm done," he thought. "This man can see through me." They walked up Mount Street towards South Audley Street.

Serle said: "Now, my young friend, let's get this straight. . . ."

WHEN she rang up in the morning a strange man's voice answered her. She gave her name. The man did not catch it for a little time. Then she waited. . . .

"I see!" she thought. "Oh, I see! Well, explanations are forthcoming. . . ."

She bottled down any other thoughts. "Now don't

be silly!'" she said. Then she heard his voice and her heart gave a jump.

"Oh Charles, where were you last night? I rang you up, and——"

His voice was so low that she could scarcely hear what he said.

"You've been smoking too many cigarettes," she said. She said to herself: "Now, not too hearty!"

"I went out."

"Oh, I see. . . ."

She told herself sharply: "Don't make an ass of yourself, Venetia!"

She said: "Oh Charles, I was so unhappy about not being able to ring you up before, but . . ."

He kept on saying something. In a flat voice. It sounded like, "I went for a walk with Serle." But that was fantastic.

"What is it, Charles? I can't hear you."

"I went for a walk with Serle. . . ."

That flat voice. Out of time. Funny in a man who danced so well.

She began again saying stupidly, "Oh, I see!" but just stopped herself.

"Why, how did that come about?" she asked.

Somehow she did not hear the answer. Somehow she thought of a sentence in Aunt Alice's letter . . . years ago. How was it? Something about being lonely. Oh, yes! "Don't forget how to be lonely." Yes, don't forget how to be lonely. . . . Well, she hadn't been given much of a chance to forget!

She said: "Charles, I must see you to-day."

It was extraordinary how in this, apparently . . . well, yes, with that flat voice . . . the most important conversation in her life, she simply could not concentrate on what was being said to her.

He was saying something with Serle's name in it. Why *did* he go on about that?

Those two together last night . . . talking, talking.

Great talkers, both of them. Hawks. Hawkish. With their eyes in the shadows. Dark horses. Up to something, always. Yes, they were rather alike. How Charles would hate to hear that! All the same they *were* rather alike. Not born gentlemen, and proud of it. Dark horses. Except that despair worked in them differently. Charles let despair swallow him. Peter swallowed it and then spat it out. But always up to something, both of them. Disturbers of the peace. . . .

Her peace, damn it! Oh, damn it!

His voice was madly irritating . . . and adorable. Kiss him on the forehead. A silly formal voice which had *nothing* to do with what was passing in his silly head. . . .

"Venetia, I'm afraid it's no use. You see, I'm——"

It simply did not seem worth while listening to the rubbish. . . .

She said: "Oh Charles, *really*!"

It was inconceivable that he could bother himself so! Couldn't he see, the silly man!

That formal voice was saying something very quickly. She made a grab at the word "useless."

"*What's* useless?"

It was a beautiful morning. The sun was all over the bed. What he was saying simply had nothing to do with anything, the sun or the moon or her or himself or anything. Such nonsense. Her eyes wandered vaguely up the arm holding the telephone. There was a muddy-looking bruise just above her elbow. "Another row about that!" she thought. She thought of being close to him that afternoon. That was why it was so silly to argue now. Everything would be all right in the afternoon.

She said calmly: "Look here, Charles, I must see you to-day and that's all there is to it. As for last night, I can . . ."

It seemed somehow desperately caddish, disloyal,

to Peter to say: "As for last night, I was never so bored or so miserable in my life. My God, how *can* people one has known so long and so intimately bore one so!" No, one musn't say those things. One should just make one's point. Not elaborate it. . . .

Dinner had been a long silence. She didn't mind. Peter seemed far away, and getting farther every minute. That was right, she vaguely felt, right and inevitable. You couldn't spend a whole afternoon in bed with one man and then be . . . well, receptive to another. One had to be slightly . . . well, nunlike. And a man like Peter couldn't have much to say to a nun. . . .

She dreamed her way through dinner. She supposed that Charles and she would be well off, quite rich. Well, that was a comfort. It didn't matter very much, but it was a comfort. She didn't care much where they lived. Jersey. She liked the sea. . . .

Peter began talking about a yachting-trip to Norway. Some one had asked him. Old man Anstruther. "Good, good!" she thought. He'd better go, he said, because old man Anstruther looked like making him a nice bit in some Mexican shares. And he badly needed a nice bit.

Then, at a quarter-to eleven, she was going. She put on her hat. And she saw his face in the mirror, behind her. Up to something. Thinking. Staring at her. "*Peter!*" she said. He dug his fingers into her arm, just above the elbow. It hurt like billy-o. But these things did not happen. They just did not *happen*! "Peter, don't be silly!" she said. He pushed her across the room, away from the door. Then he talked. . . .

Standing over her, walking about, he talked, implored, cursed. He wept. . . .

At first she could not take her eye off the door, could not listen. She must go, she must go, she must go. He saw her eyeing the door and laughed . . . bitterly.

But these things did not *happen*! Men stopping one from leaving them and laughing . . . bitterly!

Then she saw a definite picture of Charles ringing up and getting no answer. That one! And ringing up again. The way he grabbed at pain and shoved it inside himself. All the pain in the world. The hurt tormented eyes. She felt herself turning cold with hatred for Peter. Hatred. She tried to check it, but she couldn't. Hatred. And he saw it. He stammered: "My God!" She could not say anything. He stared at her for a long time, stared at her as though she was something unbelievable, awful. . . .

She pulled herself together, but every time she thought of the telephone ringing in her bedroom it kept on coming back. Icy hatred. Then she had to kiss him. She had to kiss him. To show him that he was not repulsive to her. He kept on about that, about being repulsive to her. So she had to kiss him. She thought: "This is wrong. I shall be punished for this kiss." And she thought about that for a while, not listening to a word Peter said.

Once she said, quite calmly: "Peter, if I lose him through you, I shall never see you again."

He reminded her of her childhood. What he had felt, out at the front, on receiving her first photograph. He wept. Her head was splitting. What a day! *What* a day. . . .

He called her a filthy name. "That's what you are," he said.

She didn't mind that. Certain things rebounded from certain men in a certain way. All right, all right. . . .

He said: "God, only three weeks ago you were sleeping with me—and now you're messing about with that fellow!"

She said: "Not messing about, not messing about." Suddenly she was angry, furious. "*Not* messing about, I tell you! How dare you, Peter!"

That silenced him for a long time. She was so tired, so tired.

She said: "Now I *must* go!" But she was too tired to get up from her chair.

He said: "You had better understand this. Venetia, *I am not to be got rid of.* You had better understand that."

For a moment she was very frightened. Suppose he wasn't to be got rid of. . . .

It occurred to her that that kind of remark was part of the routine of these wretched discussions. Manly. A man being a man. A man standing no nonsense. . . .

She told him, very gently, not to be a baby. "Oh, Peter dear, such a silly baby!"

He had caught at her then, had covered her face with kisses. . . .

She began crying with nerves, too weak to push him away.

He held her to him as though she had told him she loved him after all. And she was too tired to begin telling him all over again, that he *must* leave her alone. Too tired. She couldn't, in this state, be emphatic. It was half-past two. He looked quite happy now, as though, in spite of everything, he was certain of something . . . certain of her. Well, she couldn't begin all over again. For comfort's sake. . . . Oh, just to be in bed! She let him go on like that, let him see her home in that mood. If she had only known that he was going to see Charles!

That was the mistake—letting him go away thinking that everything might be all right after all. *That* was the mistake—letting him go away with his conceit patched up—to see Charles—who simply had not got enough conceit—not of the sort a woman could rely on, anyhow.

Peter was clever. Oh, clever! If he saw Charles was wretchedly, angrily jealous of him . . .

She interrupted herself to say: "Charles, darling,

you really are absurd! Why aren't you conceited in a way which would do you—and me—some good? And if you would only let me explain about last night you'd have something to be conceited about. I can tell you——"

Then she could hardly believe her ears.

"Oh, *that*!" he said.

She was astounded. She sat up in bed.

"But, Charles, weren't you worrying about last night?"

Funny how the worst comes true. As soon as he had said he had seen Peter last night she had thought of the worst thing that could happen. But why should the worst happen?

She listened very, very carefully. The flat formal voice said: "I thought I had told you that I saw Serle after he had taken you home."

"But," she began, and then . . . funny how the worst comes true. Of course, of course. Dark horses, both of them. Up to something. Fat lot of a chance she had between *those* two. . . .

She said: "Prince Charles, my darling, didn't it occur to you that it wasn't very fair to me—your seeing Peter like that?"

He said: "Fair?"

Yes, that was all right. Fair was a word. Her mistake. Fair. It didn't occur, really. Not really. What had she said once? "Hearts have no manners." Yes, yes. Hearts have No manners. . . .

The flat formal voice said: "I hear you used to call him the Black Prince. You ought to be more versatile, Venetia."

Something that had always been at the back of her mind popped out of her, filled the room, made noises. Something she had *almost* thought for years. It made faces at her in the sunlight. It said: "Life is so terrible that we can only live it by taking glimpses of it. Keep our eyes open, and it would be unbearable.

Glimpses are enough for us. Glimpses of those we love. No more than glimpses. Or we're done. . . ."

She whispered: "My sweet one, I kiss you on the forehead. And this afternoon I shall come and see you."

The flat formal voice began saying something, and then it broke completely. The wire seemed to tremble.

"Venetia, don't you understand that it will be agony for me to see you!"

"Stuff!" she said. Happy day! Oh, happy day! His voice was trembling. Oh, bliss!

He said bitterly—but in his Prince Charles the lover voice—he said: "If you knew what I went through last night, you wouldn't laugh."

Happy day! Oh, happy day! His voice was trembling. Oh, bliss, bliss, *bliss*! He loved her. . . .

She said calmly: "My darling, you can't expect me to talk sense now. All I can think of is that I am going to see you in a few hours' time. . . ."

She lay in bed for a long time, thinking. When the telephone bell went she told her maid not to answer it. Peter had had his innings last night. She was very angry with Peter, but she couldn't really think angrily about him. Oh, happy day! It would be all right as soon as Charles saw her. He couldn't look into her eyes and not know that . . . the other thing just didn't *matter*.

When her maid asked her what she would wear she said that she had such faith in her personal appearance that day that it really didn't matter what she wore . . . but that, on the other hand, it mattered so much that she would wear the same dress as yesterday. For a great part of love, she thought, is memory. "And the same hat," she said. It was so tight, the wretched thing, that it would be a pleasure to take it off.

HE said: "What you simply don't seem to understand, Venetia, is that . . ."

She had always, when she had thought of his looks at all, thought of him as an ugly man. But he wasn't, not a bit. A hawk. Hawkish. And the shadows suited him. The dark, tormented way he was staring at her, pushing her away from him . . . that suited him. The lamb. The frowning lamb. And what an ass! Oh dear. . . .

She said: "I've been waiting here for you for ages. Now sit down, Charles, and let's talk this over."

When she had come, the severe-looking maid downstairs had shown her into the automatic lift without a word. Once upstairs, she had had to wait a little before knocking on his door. Her heart was beating. Then, the door opening, she had said quickly: "Oh Charles!" But it was not Charles. A man-servant.

"Mr. Savile is out, madam."

She had said coldly: "He is expecting me. I will wait."

She had swept past the man, not looking at him. But he had made a comic little scramble past her and had opened the sitting-room door for her.

She had wanted so much to wait in the bedroom. . . .

Why did he have a man there? In a small flat. Yesterday, there had been no man. What did it mean, his having a man there to-day? In a small flat.

Sitting down on the sofa, she listened intently. Maybe the man was only there to clear up things, maybe he would be going any moment. She listened intently. He *must* go. Listening somehow made her hat seem frightfully tight. She longed to take it off. . . .

The man came in. She hated him so, she did not dare look at him. He put a flat tin box of cigarettes and a box of matches near her. Pera cigarettes. So he smoked Pera. Peter smoked Gold Flakes. She was

going up in the social scale. The man pottered about a bit and then went out. As she struck a match she realised that her hands were like ice.

How cruel to keep her waiting! Why was he so cruel to her? Why was he so cruel to himself?

It seemed to her that she had only one longing in the world, to take off her hat. It pressed round her head, the confounded little thing, like a demon.

But she couldn't take off her hat without asking. "Better for me," she thought, "if I could take it off. We amateurs!"

Some people could do things and not be punished for them. Her father, Peter, Charles, many of the women she knew . . . they could do things and not be punished for them. What was the phrase? Yes, they "got away with" it. But she . . . didn't. She had done only two wrong things, bad things, in her life. And she was being punished for both of them. Nothing had been condoned. It was wrong to have ever let Peter make love to her when she didn't love him. And it was wrong, after having kept him away for years, to have let him make love to her three weeks ago. Two wrongs. Why *had* she let him, three weeks ago at Lacey Moat? Why, why, *why*? Not that it had meant anything to her. Peter's love-making had never meant anything to her. She had always felt quite nun-like afterwards. It had never meant anything, ever. Done out of sort of politeness. She wondered how many women slept with men out of politeness. Lots. And now all this fuss . . . and cruelty. Impossible to explain that lapse three weeks ago. Impossible to explain to Charles that he *had* had a good deal to do with that, that she had been afraid of him in her life —the disturber of the peace. Impossible to explain that the poor woman Janice had had something to do with it too. . . .

There were door-noises outside. Then the man's voice saying something. Then, while she was still

listening, unprepared, Charles had come in quickly and had said, in an extraordinarily pathetic voice:

"What you simply don't seem to understand, Venetia, is that it's perfect agony for me to see you. I couldn't wait for you to come. Anyhow, not in this flat. I can't bear this flat after last night. . . ."

She had begged him to sit down beside her on the sofa.

Really she was listening intently. For door-noises outside. That man *must* go. He must leave them alone. She willed him. . . .

Charles took a cigarette from the box near her. As he lit it she noticed for the first time that his thick wavy hair had a lot of grey in it. He hovered about, hawkish. Not looking towards her. Frowning, smoking. And all about *nothing*. . . .

She said: "May I take off my hat, please?"

He didn't seem to hear her. Anyhow, she did. Oh, how nice! The confounded little thing. . . .

He was hovering, frowning, smoking. Suddenly—from the other end of the room—he looked towards her and said:

"I shall never live in this flat again. I've just been to an agent's to sell the lease."

As though it was her fault. . . .

She simply did not dare to say: "Anyhow, you would have to sell it when we're married." If she said that, what mightn't he say?

She said: "Charles, my darling, do come and sit down—rest yourself a little. You look so tired!"

"Tired!" he said sharply. And laughed. "Yes, I'm tired all right, Venetia."

She was listening all the time. *Willing* that wretched man outside to go. . . .

"If you only knew," she said, "what I went through last night at not being able to get home to ring you up!"

He was near her, above her, staring at her.

He said: "Aren't you satisfied with what you've done already? Why do you want to go on torturing me?"

She lost her head completely. Couldn't say anything at all. Was he talking to *her*?

He said: "For God's sake, Venetia, don't put me in the position of having to say beastly things to you. Please go away, leave me alone——"

She heard a high surprised voice saying: "But I'm going to stay here—always!"

There was a door-noise outside. He had gone! Oh, he had gone, he had gone! They were alone together.

She became, to herself, a different woman. . . .

He frowned, closing his eyes for a second, as though they hurt him. Then he said patiently: "Don't you see, Venetia, that it's impossible—this! Impossible. I simply cannot bear it. Don't you see?"

She said: "Sit down here—here! *Please*, Charles!"

It was awful, terrible, that she couldn't call him Prince Charles any more. . . .

He pressed his hand against his forehead, muttering: "My God, *that* man! If only it wasn't him!"

She said savagely: "Charles, won't you ever stop talking nonsense about that! Listen to me—please listen! *I do not care a button if I never see Peter again.* I admit it was a mistake to dine with him last night. I never will again. I don't want to, if you feel like this about it."

She added: "And if anything happens . . . to us . . . I shall certainly never see him again."

He sat down on the sofa near her. She wondered if he had heard what she had said. He was staring at the carpet. The shadows round his eyes. . . .

He said patiently: "You don't understand, Venetia. It's got nothing to do with your caring for him or not caring for him—or seeing him or not seeing him. That part of it doesn't . . . really interest me."

She said: "Then, my darling . . ."

It was somehow fascinating, horribly, to wait for the next awful thing he was going to say. In that patient worn-out voice. . . .

He went on, staring at the carpet: "What matters . . . what matters like the devil . . . is his just being *there*—that man!" He turned to her savagely. "D'on't you *see*—that's why I avoid looking at you now—that man's there too—I can't see you alone!"

"But," she said, "that's just—hysteria!"

He turned away again, passed his hand over his eyes.

"Oh, hysteria!" he said wearily. "I suppose all love is hysteria, if it comes to that. Well, let this be hysteria. . . ."

She said calmly: "Charles, I am not going to let you ruin my life for the sake of a——"

That did it. As though he had been waiting for that. The dark horse. His eyes seemed to bore into her. He said: "And what about my life? Haven't you made a pretty complete mess of that for me? Before I met you there was at least the hope that I might meet some one with whom I could share a life. But now! What the hell am I to do now? What the *hell* am I to do?"

And he said: "It seems almost impossible to make you understand, Venetia. Won't you see that I simply can't take you as having anything to do with me? Won't you see that as far as I'm concerned—that man's there!"

She said, sobbing: "But he's not, he's *not*!"

He did not listen. He said: "You belong to—anyway not to me. He said last night: 'A man does not stay all night with a Venetia and wake beside her in the morning—and then pass on. A man does not. That becomes part of his life—*is* his life, in the sense that all the other things of his life fall down on him if anything should happen to that intimacy. A man does not pass on.' And I agree with him—absolutely. There

are certain ultimate things—ultimate women—in a man's life. And when he has reached them—a man does not pass on."

She said: "But what about me—*me*! This thing here. Any one would think that I was—that I was a parcel!" She broke down. "Charles, my darling, I'm *myself* . . . and giving myself to you! I don't belong to any one but myself . . . and I'm giv——"

He said wearily: "That feminist argument about women not belonging to any one but themselves—it doesn't work in practice."

She thought queerly: "No, it doesn't . . . with pirates. Pirates!"

He said: "I wish to God it did! If they only *did* belong to themselves . . . if *you* only did!"

She said to herself that she had known this was going to happen all along. That was why she had wanted, had tried, to keep him out of her life. The disturber of the peace. She had known, all along. How funny it was that one went on believing in things which one knew couldn't come to anything. How funny it was that one believed in things that one knew didn't exist. Like a kind God. . . .

He was sitting bent forward, his elbows on his knees, one hand over his eyes.

She said: "Then this is the end. . . ."

She closed her eyes. This was the end, this was the end. . . .

If only he would look at her once with eyes that saw her! Then he would want her. She must *make* him look at her. . . .

When she opened her eyes he was staring at her, pathetically, hungrily. She threw herself into his arms, sobbing, laughing. He covered her face with kisses, pressed her to him, lifted her bodily on to the sofa beside him. Her emotion was unbearable, an agony. Her eyes seemed to die.

Suddenly, terror made her open them. He was not looking at her. He was staring, brooding. His eyes were slack. He almost pushed her away from him.

She got up blindly. As she arranged her crumpled clothes she felt her face burning, as though she was in a room with a stranger. She could not find her hat for a little while. She had thrown it down anywhere—as she had yesterday. She ran out of the room, whimpering.

MUCH water has flowed beneath the bridges of Father Thames since that time. There have been wars and dissensions everywhere. There has been Progress. Sir Alan Cobham has flown to Australia and back. The franc has been down to 248 to the pound sterling. Germany has been admitted to the Council of the League of Nations. There has been a General Strike and a Coal strike. And now Lord Townleigh waxes in magnificence. But time changes all things and all men. Lord Townleigh is loved as well as feared. What was said of the divine Augustus is said of him: "In his old age he softened towards the world." Young men and young women say of the puissant earl: "He is my favourite millionaire." His grandson Michael Sass (who, like a number of the destined and mysterious people born in sin, grows in strength and beauty) is the apple of the old man's eye. Mr. Serle waxes in eminence. But, like Lord Birkenhead and Mr. Churchill, he is suspected by his party of having brains. He still refuses the obscure honour of a peerage. He says: "I am of the people." You say: "But you are a Conservative, almost a Die-hard!" He says: "So are the people." The Vardon fortunes multiply. Jasper Vardon recently gave the magnificent sum of £125,000 for cancer research. He is now Sir Jasper Vardon, Bart. It is said he has a girl somewhere who has made him give up smoking and is try-

ing to make him give up drinking as well. His daughter, the beautiful Lady Archery, is very seldom seen in London these days. She and young Raphael live in the country, where Mr. Serle spends many of his week-ends. Miss Ysabel Fuller retired from the stage on her marriage to Savile, the writer. They live in Paris, where Ysabel is a shining light in the wealthier circles of Anglo-American society. It is said that it is owing to her extravagance and social aspiration that Savile has returned to his former style of writing, his books now being best-sellers again. Freddy Messenger died last year. Young Raphael, by the way, now sits in Parliament in the Labour interest.

The End of the book called *Young Men in Love.*

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